

## Songs for “Great Leaders”



# Songs for “Great Leaders”

*Ideology and Creativity in North Korean  
Music and Dance*

KEITH HOWARD

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# Introduction

A good jigsaw takes a devotee many hours to assemble. A complex jigsaw can sit for months before it is completed, and a novice will likely only get part way through before abandoning the puzzle. Still, three quarters of a century after the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (hereafter, North Korea) was founded, few accounts of its art, and fewer still of its music and dance, have seen the light of day. In respect to music and dance, like a jigsaw puzzle just begun, it would be a big ask to expect a single volume to provide a full account, slotting everything into place from the first to last piece. This may seem a defensive position to take in my opening paragraph, but commentators who write about North Korea routinely point out that they are attempting to read tea leaves, as the available data is partial, incomplete, and often contradictory. An archive may hold just one or two of what should be a series of volumes. Some records that ought to be present have disappeared from official accounts. Some composers, singers, groups, and musical activities are forgotten—that is, until someone unexpectedly stumbles on a dusty and previously unknown old text.

In addition, access to materials is often restricted. It is as if some materials have been stamped, for some mysterious reason, secret. In Pyongyang, finding a publication from just a decade ago can require a search worthy of a detective. To copy a recording may require initiating a campaign to gain the necessary permissions. One only suspects that certain documents exist; denied access, one is told that one has no need for a particular item, or that it will be provided tomorrow—but tomorrow never arrives. A text by a specific author may be republished in a very different form, reflecting ideological changes. One particularly pertinent example, *Haebanghu Chosŏn ūmak* (Korean Music after Liberation), with Ri Hirim as its lead author, was published in both 1956 and 1979, but whereas the first version has two chapters devoted to Soviet influence and to instrumental and orchestral composition (1956, 233–56), the second omits all mention of the Soviet Union, lists only song compositions, and starts with a discussion of Kim Il Sung's extensive involvement in cultural development. Again, collections of northern materials exist in the Republic of Korea

(hereafter, South Korea), but so does a national security law that limits not just access, but also much public discussion. Commentaries on northern music and dance by southern authors frequently explore the ties that bind—evidence of a continuing tradition and the remains of what is claimed to have once been a homogeneous culture—at the expense of ideology or difference. And although the Internet has brought greater access to some materials, go-betweens decide what is available. At all times, one must consider the motivations that lie behind what is presented, and should never ignore what is *not* available.

Meeting North Korean scholars and artists is not easy. Research in Pyongyang is heavily controlled, and permission to do anything has to be sought from opaque and unknown bodies. Visits to a school, to a children's palace (where selected gifted children receive specialist training), or to a university need to be approved in advance. Visits will be scheduled that were not requested. Permission to record performances may or may not be given. Travel beyond the boundaries of the capital will usually be resisted. Academic research develops by following leads, but to do so is not possible in Pyongyang. Interviews, if allowed, will routinely be supervised, and it is sensible to assume that everything one does will be monitored. A foreign researcher can hardly approach people in the street or students in a university canteen and ask detailed questions. No researcher has free and unfettered access to a library or an archive, and tedium sets in when multiple sources reveal, as Scalapino and Lee (1972, 890) memorably put it, "unalleviated mediocrity and monotony."

North Korea's state apparatus means that, at the most basic level, potential danger accrues to those one works with, talks to, and sits with more than to the foreign researcher who, after a brief sojourn in Pyongyang, will be expected (and hopefully allowed) to leave the country. With this in mind, it is not surprising that an ethnography can dehumanize or deontologize, as it depopulates its pages of the people it purports to study. Here, the interviews I cite are "on the record," but when a comment was made in an aside, or where a statement contradicted state ideology, I have carefully considered whether anonymity should be maintained or, indeed, whether I can include such a comment at all. The musicians, artists, and scholars I have met in North Korea have, even as they maintain the approved perspectives, proven themselves knowledgeable, articulate, and thoughtful; each is worthy of attention, and I have a responsibility to relay and interpret what they have told me. But in doing so I also have a responsibility not to create problems for the innocent. I am not blind to the well-documented reports of human rights' abuses, but if I here refrain from criticism, it is because my aim is to assemble the

jigsaw that constitutes cultural production. I do not deny that cultural activities are, or can be, political. In North Korea, culture reinforces ideological structures that control people. At the same time, as Rüdiger Frank notes in his introduction to *Exploring North Korean Arts*, “a cowardly avoidance of the topic altogether might be safe, but is not helpful” (2011, 28). Hence, in this study I aim to offer insights into what is often said to be an unknown, reclusive, and secretive state, to offer an exercise in consilience<sup>1</sup> by fitting some of the pieces into the puzzle that is North Korea.

I was first permitted to visit North Korea in 1992, hosted by the Isang Yun Music Research Institute (Yun Isang ūmak yŏnguso). Yun (1917–1995), whom I write about in Chapter 8, was Korea’s best-known composer in the international arena during the latter part of the twentieth century, and he helped me gain permission for my research. He had watched me perform (South) Korean music at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival in 1988—where he was a featured composer—and had patiently listened to me introduce a *p’ansori* recital elsewhere; I had twice interviewed him in Berlin as I documented Korean composers (for two publications: Howard 1992, 1999). I returned to Pyongyang in 2000, as the United Kingdom (along with other European states) negotiated to establish diplomatic relations. For both trips, I negotiated work schedules in advance and was admitted to conduct specific research. I was able to conduct multiple interviews, take individual workshops on specific instruments and on dance (and dance notation), collect copious materials, and observe and record rehearsals and performances. I have subsequently met and talked with North Koreans in Britain, China, and South Korea, have sporadically received replies from Pyongyang when I have asked questions, and have tracked down and consulted materials in archives, libraries, and personal collections across East Asia, Europe, and America. Still, this volume is, and by necessity must be, far from a complete account. I have never freely traveled the North Korean countryside; my knowledge of private music-making is almost all secondhand; I have not visited all the institutions and places, nor met and interviewed all those I would like to; and I have still not found every score, recording, and journal article that ought to exist.

### **Songs as the soundtrack to North Korea**

North Korea behaves as if its whole territory is a theater, and as if all performances of music and dance project the country, the state apparatus,

and the population. The theater is for both domestic and international audiences. In stating this, I acknowledge the account by Suk-Young Kim (2010), but let me go further: songs form much of the soundtrack to the theater of daily life. Songs embed messages that tell the official history, the exploits of leaders, and of the socialist utopia yet to come. To Thomas More, utopia was not real but a fictional place; hence North Korea struggles to position itself, in a recurring *Groundhog Day* sort of existence, between persistent shortfalls in the present and promises of abundance in the future. Song genres link to Korea's past, continuing traditions known before 1945, and matching to Soviet and Chinese practice (for which, see Chapter 1). In ways that evoke parallels elsewhere, songs provide key pillars for state ideology, and function today with contemporary groups such as Moranbong, Samjiyŏn, and Ŭnhasu, just as they did with their predecessors, Wangjaesan and Pochonbo (Chapter 9). Songs form the building blocks of revolutionary operas (Chapters 4–6). Song aesthetics impact on instrumental soundworlds (Chapters 2–3), and song melodies structure instrumental and orchestral compositions (Chapter 8). Songs are rearranged in countless versions; they provide the musical background for mass performance spectacles that showcase gymnastics, dance, and more (Chapter 7). In Pyongyang, songs are constantly heard, from morning to night. North Koreans are daily reminded how their songs are beamed around the world, formerly (supposedly) by satellite, but today uploaded by Uriminzokkiri and by others—sympathizers and detractors—to the Internet.

Songs, and music and dance more generally, offer windows through which we can glimpse North Korea. My account spans the period from 1945 to 2018. Chapter 1 first introduces songs written in the northern part of the peninsula shortly after liberation, or which are claimed in the official telling to date from earlier, and Chapter 9 ends in 2018, when a North Korean troupe visited South Korea during the Pyeongchang Winter Olympic Games and as a South Korean troupe, in return, visited North Korea, singing songs. By way of introduction, though, I must first look back to earlier in the twentieth century, when the Korean peninsula was a Japanese colony. Korean history is, of course, contested, as is the very legitimacy of the two Korean states set up when the peninsula was divided with the defeat of Japan at the end of World War II, and as is the uniqueness of ideologies and practices that then developed on either side of what became the dividing line—the DMZ.

Scholars have begun to chart how cultural production, including music, had begun to move in two very different directions by the 1930s, as



campaigns for localization and modernization became polarized. By then, Japan's colonialist "gaze" curated Korea's folklore and archaeology, and identified in Korea something of Japan's premodern past (Atkins 2010, 93–161; see also Pai 1994, 1998). By then, Korean folk songs and folk dances were being staged in new ways for new urban audiences (as would continue in North Korea; see Chapters 1 and 7). To many Koreans, traditional cultural production, including traditional music, was part of the past (and this would be taken up in North Korean rhetoric; see Chapters 2–3 and 5). But the past had failed: why else had the Korean peninsula, home to Chosŏn, the longest-lasting dynasty in East Asia, and home to a relatively homogeneous population with a claimed 5,000-year history, become the colony of an island state to its east that had always been distant to China, distant to the home of proper Confucian governance and social hierarchy? To many, it could not be imagined that traditional culture would in time assume the iconicity and high watermark with which South Koreans and many foreign scholars regard it today. So, a word of warning: do not consider "Korean music" to be just the music that emanates from South Korea, a construction that for traditional music (as *kugak*, literally, "national music") looks back from what music has become as a result of state patronage, academic study, and international performance and promotion to reinterpret history (Howard 2016, Hee-sun Kim forthcoming). Equally, though, be wary of assuming that the ubiquity and commerce of South Korean K-pop is part of the theater of Pyongyang's daily life.

I ask readers to picture Seoul or Pyongyang in the 1930s or early 1940s. During the dark days (*amhŭkki*, Poole 2014, 4–5) of colonial rule, Japan extended its control beyond Korea into Manchuria. Japan moved toward war and tightened its grip on its colonial subjects. Korean intellectuals, writers, and artists looked for potential ways forward. The present was when change and modernization could prepare for the idealized future. Japan, after all, had accepted the need for modernization, and since the Meiji Restoration it had become the conduit through which many Western ideas entered East Asia. But could Japan provide a model for Korea's modernization? Many Korean intellectuals, writers, and artists had trained in Osaka and Tokyo, since opportunities to travel to Europe or the United States were limited. After 1945 many migrated from the South to the North, sympathetic, as so many intellectuals and artists always are, to the socialist cause. There had, though, been few writers and artists among those in Manchuria who fought the Japanese as Korean guerrillas, who allied themselves to the Chinese

Communists in the 1930s and sheltered in the Soviet Far East in the early 1940s. How could the socialist ideas that swept across the region provide a way to reinvigorate cultural production when so many intellectuals, writers, and artists were familiar with Japan, and saw the West through Japanese filters? One solution was to match the familiar to the unfamiliar, so although, not surprisingly, commentators identify Korean and Japanese roots, or Soviet and Chinese models, I contend North Korea developed fusions of all of these.

In North Korea, music and musicians were, and remain, instruments of the state. Musicians were, and are, members of the military, and music was, and is, used to grandstand ideology and policy. Throughout the existence of North Korea, songs indicate the important role music has been given. Colonial era school songs (K. *chàngga*) from, or modeled on, Japanese equivalents (J. *shōka*), were adjusted to become revolutionary songs, not dissimilar to Chinese and Soviet mass songs. Folk songs popularized during colonial times were recast to fit socialism. Songs helped create the official history, in which Kim Il Sung defeated the colonial Japanese in 1945, defeated America in the Korean War, and then led the reconstruction of a “socialist paradise.” Songs embraced the notion of the popular, in which the masses were regarded as the creators of everything, but never forgetting that the Korean Workers’ Party knew and, in its policies, fully reflected the people’s desires. Songs therefore create the arch that spans this volume. Chapters 1 and 9 map the two chronological ends as foundation stones, while Chapters 4–6 function as the capstone, discussing revolutionary operas—song operas—that intimately link the first two North Korean leaders, father and son Kim Il Sung (1912–1994) and Kim Jong Il (1942<sup>2</sup>–2011). The remaining chapters complete the arch. Chapters 2 and 3 explore instruments, isolating formative issues and ideologies that justified creating “improved” (*kaeryang*) versions of traditional instruments (*chǒnt’ong akki*) as national instruments (*minjok akki*). Claims by Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il that in North Korea, national instruments should match or exceed the abilities of Western instruments, while Western instruments must be made subservient to a Korean soundworld, are persistent undercurrents in this discussion. Chapter 7 shifts to mass performance spectacles and dance, and moves from the present—and from the intention to make people part of spectacles—back to the colonial era, when staged dances emerged, most notably through the choreography of Chŏe Sŭnghŭi. Chapter 8 looks at how, with songs dominating public spaces, composers developed large-scale compositions based

on them for instrumental ensembles and orchestras. In Chapter 8, in order to ask how the avant-garde can be squared with the North's ideology laden policies, I look at Korea's most famous composer, Isang Yun.

## Conventions

I conducted all the interviews cited, unless otherwise indicated, but where appropriate I have adjusted the grammar of quotations—everyone has the right for their words to be rendered adequately. The sheer quantity of speeches by Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, and the various forms in which they have been published at different times, can make a reference list unwieldy, so I cite speeches and writing by (or written for) the two Kims in the text. Quotation marks are used to signal claims made in speeches or in publications about music and dance, but also about historical events and other matters that can be disputed. Again, to avoid clogging up the reference list, Internet sources are cited in endnotes except where the source is a significant article or book; Internet addresses were operational as of December 31, 2018, unless otherwise stated. I give publication dates for North Korean sources based on the versions consulted. Much biographical information on composers and musicians is sourced from publications by Kim Tökkyun and Kim Tükchöng (1998), Chang Yöngchöl (1998, 2001) and Mun Söngnyöp (2001). Two journals provide a veritable treasure trove of materials on cultural, musical, and dance matters, *Chosön ūmak* (*Korean Music*) published between 1955 and 1968, and the still monthly *Chosön yesul* (*Korean Arts*).<sup>3</sup> However, journal articles tend to be short and repeat material covered elsewhere, so I give full references only where an article has significance in its own right, otherwise using shorthand to give only the year and month of publication (e.g., 1963/11, 1964/1). A full discussion of these two journals is beyond my scope here; I will offer a more detailed consideration in a future article.

As with most publications by foreign scholars on Korea, I use the McCune-Reischauer romanization system for Korean terms, while Pinyin is used for Chinese, and Hepburn for Japanese. For clarity I add “K.,” “J.,” or “C.” to indicate Korean, Japanese, or Chinese, respectively. The accuracy of McCune-Reischauer is such that it allows the ready substitution of Korean script, and therefore makes a character glossary redundant; it enables researchers to find materials in library collections and music archives

around the world that other systems fail to do. It also has the benefit, despite the challenge presented by diacriticals, of allowing foreigners to make reasonable stabs at pronouncing Korean terms. It would be inappropriate to use the romanization system now in use in South Korea and approved by its government, and North Korea has not consistently applied a single system over its 75-year existence. Although I appreciate the sensitivities around individual preferences, I render personal names given in Korean in published sources in McCune-Reischauer, without hyphenation. However, I respect preferred spellings where these are printed; where a composition, publication, or recording is distributed in the international market; or where a person is well-known outside Korea. Hence Kim Il Sung [Kim Ilsŏng], Kim Jong Il [Kim Chŏngil], and Kim Jong Un [Kim Chŏngŭn]. In the reference list, I use square brackets to give an author's name in McCune-Reischauer only where this facilitates cross-checking between sources in Korean and English (or other languages).

I use the internationally accepted “Pyongyang” and “Seoul” for the northern and southern capitals. Due to familiarity, I use “juche” (unitalicized) rather than “*chuch'e*,” and, to reflect pronunciation, “shi” rather than “si” (*shin* rather than *sin*). I retain the North Korean preference for an initial “r” (Ri, rather than Lee or Yi; *rabal* rather than *nabal*). In Korea, both North and South, the family name comes first, followed by one or two given names (each usually of one syllable). I follow this convention, except where a person is well-known outside of Korea with their family name after their given name(s); hence, Isang Yun (rather than Yun Isang). To indicate where the author of a book or article gives their name in the Western way (with family name after given names), the reference list introduces a comma after the family name; the comma is omitted where the book or article gives the author's name in the Korean way (that is, with the family name before given names)—as is always the case where a publication is in Korean. In the reference list, translations of titles from Korean are only given where these appear on publications. Titles of songs, compositions, and other works are given in quotation marks, with the Korean (italicized) preceding an English translation or transliteration on the first occurrence, while Korean journal and newspaper titles are given in italics, followed, on the first occurrence, by an English translation in brackets. I use English versions of song titles and lyrics where available, but otherwise offer my own translations. Some speeches by Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il have appeared in many versions and, where possible, I give

the date of publication to identify which version I am citing; I make use of authorized English translations where available, noting, when appropriate, how these differ from Korean originals. I use the familiar Gregorian calendar, and not North Korea's recently instituted calendar (which counts from "juche 1"—Kim Il Sung's year of birth).

# 1

## Songs for the Great Leader

We are making a revolution, and we should inspire the people to the revolutionary struggle by means of songs.

—Kim Jong Il, 1975

Watch the daily news on North Korea's state television—or many of the clips of news broadcasts available online—and you will observe the image of a torch superimposed at the top left of the screen.<sup>1</sup> This is the *juche* torch, reminding people of an ideology that for many years has been vital and central to North Korea and its cultural production, but which, in September 1998, began as an image of a satellite, similar in size and color. It first appeared days after North Korea claimed to have launched its first satellite, Kwangmyŏngsŏng (Bright Star). The technology required to get a satellite into orbit was, international critics warned, much the same as that required to launch missiles; hence, when it first appeared, the television reporter announced, and the superimposed image forever after reminded viewers, that the satellite had a peaceful purpose: to broadcast North Korean songs 24/7 around the world. Some 23 years before this, on May 6, 1975, Kim Jong Il, then the Dear Leader, the son of the Eternal President Kim Il Sung (who in life had been the Great Wise President-for-Life Dearly Beloved and Sagacious Leader) and father of today's leader, Kim Jong Un (b. 1983<sup>2</sup>), had given a speech from which the quote opening this chapter is taken, "For the further development of our *juche* art."<sup>3</sup> That speech began: "Our art is now winning fame throughout the world. All countries regard the visit of a Korean art troupe as good fortune." Even in a world where cultural diplomacy has become commonplace, Kim's claims seem hard to square with reality. But, given that few outside the country regularly tune in to Pyongyang's television news, the images of the satellite and the torch function as propaganda aimed, first and foremost, at a domestic audience. Until recently, songs served the local audience, but today they are uploaded to YouTube and Youku and aimed at global citizens.

Songs rehearse ideology, announce state policy, and memorialize history. Songs populate the soundscape of Pyongyang, marking the rituals and the theater of daily life. Many thousands have been produced, as the title to a 1994 volume, *Chosŏn kayo 2000 kokchip* (Collection of 2,000 Korean Songs), indicates. Before that volume appeared, the four volumes of *Chosŏn myŏnggok chip* (Collection of Celebrated Songs, 1975) strategically ranked songs, arranging “revolutionary” (*hyŏngmyŏng*) paeans at the top, followed by songs about Kim Il Sung’s family, descriptions of key historical events, and songs from “revolutionary operas” (*hyŏngmyŏng kagŭk*).<sup>4</sup> The first six volumes of a larger, multivolume compendium, *Chosŏn ūmak chŏnjip* (Collection of Korean Music, 1982–1985), contained almost 3,000 songs, arranged by date, and separating children’s songs from film songs—the latter opening with songs written for the soundtrack to the important 1949 film, “*Nae kohyang/My Hometown*” by the teenage Kim Yŏngdo (1932–1979), and ending with songs by the celebrated composer Sŏng Tongch’un (b. 1937) for a 1980 remake of the folk tale “*Ch’unhyangjŏn/Story of ‘Spring Fragrance.’*” A more recent compendium, *Chosŏn norae taejŏn chip* (2002), crammed an encyclopedic 8,000 songs into its 2,426 pages.

“My Hometown” is claimed as the first locally produced film. It was written by Kim Sŏnggu and directed by Kang Hongshil—Kang had worked as a singer and director during the latter years of Japanese colonial rule (1910–1945). It is routinely considered to have kick-started the revision of history to claim, as North Koreans are now taught, that liberation in 1945 from the colonial yoke came because of the efforts of Kim Il Sung, not because of the Allies.<sup>5</sup> The film’s story mirrors Kim Il Sung’s early life, and is an early telling of what became standard within his leadership cult: a boy, depicted as the hero, grows up with his mother near the Chinese border after his father dies, yearning to return home. In contrast, “*Ch’unhyangjŏn*” was and remains iconic: it formed the subject matter of the second ever silent film and the first film with sound made in Korea, both made long before the 1945 division of the peninsula left today’s two rival states. For the northern regime, “*Ch’unhyangjŏn*” offered a tale “apt for an ideological interpretation” (Hyangjin Lee 2000, 72), and it was therefore remade in various guises, including as films and as a “national opera” (*minjok kagŭk*).<sup>6</sup>

However, it was films and songs that set out Kim Il Sung’s personality cult. The first *Chosŏn ūmak chŏnjip* volume offers “50 years” of song production, measured back from its publication to when official history now has it that Kim Il Sung set up his guerrilla force, on April 25, 1932—a date

memorialized as a national holiday, and the major date in the calendar for military parades. The volume includes 11 widely known songs claimed to be older, written before or during Kim's childhood. It also includes five songs linked to Kim's family, several in the mould of Western-style, colonial-era school songs (*ch'angga*), and a pentatonic lullaby, "*Chajangga*,"<sup>7</sup> supposedly sung to Kim by his father, Kim Hyŏngjik (1894–1926). Fifty-nine more songs are described as "revolutionary songs" (*hyŏngmyŏng kayo*), supposedly composed during the 1930s and early 1940s by anonymous guerrillas fighting under Kim Il Sung.<sup>8</sup>

This chapter explores songs and their creators. Musicologists often forget that songs are the work of both lyricists and composers, and that it is lyrics that carry the messages. Note, though, that with the sole exception of the late Isang Yun, composers are celebrated in North Korea primarily for their songs.

### Songs for the people and of the people

We have two types of songs. One, *yesul kayo* (art songs), are sung by singers and actors on stages. These are songs for professionals. The other type is for our people to sing. Both types must always be popular; the people should be able to understand every song. (Ri Ch'anggu, interview, June 1992)

The senior musicologist Ri Ch'anggu was assigned to work with me during my first visit to Pyongyang in 1992. The two types of songs he differentiated to me are, essentially, songs *for* the people and songs *of* the people. Song collections and journals offer a mix, but songs *of* the people take precedence, and two are routinely given pride of place, printed on the first pages of almost all song collections and compendiums.<sup>9</sup> One is "*Aegukka*/Patriotic Song," the official national anthem. This is outward facing, designed to be sung and played for international functions more than at local events. The second, "*Kim Ilŏng changgun ŭi norae*/Song of General Kim Il Sung," is for domestic use:

Bright traces of blood on the crags of Changbaek still gleam,  
Still the Amnok carries along songs of blood in its flow,  
Still do those hallowed trees shine splendidly  
Over Korea, ever flourishing and free.



So dear to all our hearts is our General's glorious name,  
 Our own beloved Kim Il Sung of undying fame.  
 Tell blizzards that rage in the wild Manchurian plains,  
 Tell, you nights in forests deep where the silence reigns,  
 Who is the partisan whose deeds are unsurpassed?  
 Who is the patriot whose fame shall ever last?

Setting lyrics by Ri Ch'anshi, “Song of General Kim Il Sung” is heard everywhere in North Korea. It was composed in June 1946 by Kim Wŏn'gyun (1917–2002) to celebrate the first anniversary of Korea's liberation. Written in a style familiar to those brought up in any socialist state, it combines musical simplicity with ideological lyrics. The four-square march pairs two-bar phrases to build a simple ternary structure (A-A<sup>1</sup>-B-A<sup>2</sup>; Notation 1.1), and it features dotted rhythms and clearly articulated functional harmony. It is similar to Chinese *geming guqu* or Soviet *massovaya persnya* mass songs.<sup>10</sup> But it is also similar to the *ch'angga* school songs popularized across Korea during the colonial period.

This song is so ubiquitous that its lyrics are chiseled into rocks beside the paths that climb mountains, “to provide inspiration” to walkers.<sup>11</sup> It is, by any definition, popular. Back in 1905, Lenin had prepared the ground North Korea later nurtured, stating that literature and art must serve “not the bored ‘upper 10,000’ suffering from fatty degeneration, but the millions and tens of millions of working people” (Lenin 1962, Vol. 10, 47–48). This song's appeal to the fledgling regime is not hard to see. It was written nine months after Kim Il Sung returned to Pyongyang in September 1945, two years before the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was proclaimed a separate state in September 1948, and a full three years before “My Hometown” was released. It was, then, one of the first works to set out Kim's credentials as leader. Mention of Manchuria, of blizzards in the mountains, and the Amnok River refer to Kim's guerrilla hideouts and battles with Japanese colonialists during the 1930s, setting up the authorized history that remains today. In 1946, though, the memory of Soviet ambitions to impose the right-wing domestic leader Cho Manshik (1883–1950) rather than Kim were fresh in many minds,<sup>12</sup> and Kim still lacked majority support, not least because the four factions of the Korean Workers' Party remained divided.<sup>13</sup>

Within a year of writing the song, Kim Wŏn'gyun composed the music for “Patriotic Song,” setting lyrics by Pak Seyŏng that begin with the phrase “bright morning country” (*ach'imŭn pitnara*). Reflection is a wonderful

*mf*

Chang - baek - san chul-gi chulgi P'i ō - rin-ja - uk, Am - nok kang kub-i kub-i

*mp*

P'i ō - rin - ja - uk. O - nŭl to-ja - yucho - sŏn, kkot tapar - u-e,

*f*

Ryŏk, ryŏk - hi pi - ch'ŏchu - nŭn kŏ-ruk han - jauk, a - a ku i-rŭm to kŭ-rŭn, U -

*f*

ri - ŭi chang - gun, a - a kŭ i - rŭm to pin-nanŭn, Kim Il Sŏngchang - nim

**Notation 1.1** Kim Wŏngyun (1917–2002), “*Kim Il-sŏng changgun ŭi norae* (Song of General Kim Il Sung)” (1946).  
 Source: *Chosŏn ūmak chŏnjip* 1 (1982: 24).

thing, but could the commission to compose “Patriotic Song” have been a reward for “Song of General Kim Il Sung”?<sup>14</sup> Awards and appointments peppered Kim Wŏn’gyun’s subsequent career. In 1972 he received the top state award, the Kim Il Sung Prize, and was appointed “people’s artist” (*inmin paeu* or *inmin yesulga*);<sup>15</sup> in 1977 he was given responsibility to manage the collective of composers for revolutionary operas at the Sea of Blood Opera Company (P’i pada kagŭktan; see Figure 1.1); following his death, the state music conservatory was, as with Soviet practice, named after him.<sup>16</sup>

Kim’s first credited song is “*Chosŏn haengjin’gok*/Foundation March for the Nation”—the only approved song from 1945 published in the *Chosŏn ūmak chŏnjip* collection (1982, vol. 1, 121). Like “Song of General Kim Il Sung,” this is a four-square 16-bar march, but cast in binary form (A-A<sup>1</sup>-B-B<sup>1</sup>). Set in a Western F major rather than maintaining anything from earlier Korean music, it opens with a dominant to tonic upbeat leap. Its third phrase offers a slight hint of chromaticism through a momentary modulation to D minor, a procedure that thereafter became routine among Pyongyang’s composers. Kim told me in an interview in June 1992 that he wrote “Foundation March” on August 16, 1945, the day Emperor Hirohito ordered the ceasefire, and a day after broadcasting to his people that the Pacific War must end. Kim told



**Figure 1.1** Members of the composers’ collective at the Sea of Blood Opera Company, 1992. Kim Wŏn’gyun is second from the right. Photo by Keith Howard.

me he had participated in a poetry competition during the day, and both melody and lyrics came to him as he walked home.

Kim claimed to be a self-trained musician. Born in Wönsan in Kangwön Province to the east, his family moved to the outskirts of Pyongyang, and he studied art at school. He picked up the harmonica, violin, and guitar from friends. He struggled to find work as an artist, and when in 1939 his father died, he took over the family home. In May 1946, as one of the first to benefit from the Soviet practice of promoting proletarian artists lacking formal musical training, he joined what he termed to me in an interview the Pyongyang Musicians' Union (P'yöngyangshi ūmakka tongmaeng).<sup>17</sup> He dedicated himself to producing songs that would serve the regime, including "*Inchön haengjin'gok*/Foundation March for Inchön" in September 1950 in support of the northern forces caught in the pincer movement created by MacArthur's landings at Inchön, the port to the west of Seoul.

Pyongyang signed a cultural exchange agreement with Moscow in 1949 (Armstrong 2003a, 82–83), and in 1952 Kim was sent to Moscow for training. There, he wrote a four-movement violin sonata, a string quartet, and some orchestral pieces. His graduation piece was the tone poem "*Hyangtò*/Birthplace," cast in sonata form, opening with complex rhythmic fanfares and using much chromaticism. Written between October 1956 and May 1957, and broadcast in Pyongyang in March 1958 (as discussed in *Chosön ūmak* 1958/8), after Kim returned from Moscow, songs once more became his main output. During his life, he told me, he had written around 500 songs, but by 1992 he no longer actively composed; at the Pyongyang Grand Theater, the home of the Sea of Blood Company, he laughed as he remarked to me, "My colleagues do the difficult work of composing. I just supervise the business!"

Revolutionary songs claimed to predate Kim Wön'gyun's first song are labeled "immortal" (*pulmyöl*), because they link to the official account of Kim Il Sung's guerrilla activities. Their composers are not acknowledged, since keeping their origins opaque maintains Kim Il Sung's preeminent position in the liberation struggle.<sup>18</sup> One of the most celebrated revolutionary songs is "*Choguk ūi p'um*/Embrace of the Motherland":

The red glow in Moran hill,  
The beautiful rainbow on Taedong river,  
The embrace of the motherland as beautiful as the glow in the sky  
Is my beloved home, where I grew up.

The new spring when azaleas are in full bloom,  
 The sky where the skylarks sing merrily,  
 The embrace of the motherland as warm as spring days  
 Is my mother who brought me up.  
 The morning sun rising on the sea,

The stars twinkling in the night sky,  
 The embrace of the motherland as bright as sunrays  
 Is the bosom of the fatherly General.

Lyrics embrace ideology, but they also reflect the time when they are written. Those for “Embrace of the Motherland” suggest not the 1930s but the 1970s, and the mature cult of the senior Kim—which Aidan Foster Carter once referred to as “ludicrous hagiography” (1992, 11).<sup>19</sup> Kim speaks in the first two verses. The mention of Moran (Peony) Hill commemorates his first speech *after* he returned to Pyongyang in Soviet uniform in September 1945. The Taedong River serves Pyongyang, but downstream passes Mangyŏngdae, Kim’s birthplace, hence the reference to “my beloved home.” “My mother” refers to Kang Pansŏk, who left Pyongyang for Manchuria in 1920 with her son and, according to the official account, joined the women’s volunteer force to fight for independence from Japan. But the third verse reflects a different time: the claim is that it was added by a prodigious 10-year-old Kim Jong Il in 1952,<sup>20</sup> but it suggests a later time than this, since the “morning sun” refers to Kim Il Sung, who as the “fatherly General” oversaw national rebuilding *following* the 1953 armistice in the Korean War. The senior Kim, incidentally, had been born Kim Sŏngju, but adopted the name Il Sung (sun + become) during his guerrilla days in Manchuria.

“Embrace of the Motherland” is Westernized. It is cast as a Viennese waltz, set to a regular 3/4 meter where Korean folk songs are most commonly in compound 6/8, 9/8 or 12/8 meters. Like “Foundation March” it is ternary, 16 bars in length. It is in F major, with a passing modulation in its third four-bar phrase. The chord progression is standard: tonic to subdominant to dominant, cadencing back to the tonic over the first eight bars. After 1945, Soviet cultural advisers were in North Korea and set plans for production and distribution,<sup>21</sup> so songs like this, particularly when the moniker “revolutionary” is used, are often assumed to follow Soviet practice. However, such songs are equally reminiscent of the school songs promoted in Korea during the colonial period on Japanese models. Casting the net wider, stanzaic binary and ternary structures are not unlike Christian hymns, and indeed missionaries had been active in Korea since the 1880s, with Pyongyang

the center for much proselytizing in the early twentieth century. Although northern commentators reject any potential hymn influence,<sup>22</sup> at the very least it can be argued that Soviet influence fused with existing practice.

The first Korean school song is usually identified as Kim Inshik's (1885–1963) “*Haktoga/Students’ Song*,” written in 1903 (Song Pangsung 1984, 573–74; Yi Kangsuk 2001, 61). This sets a text about the thirst for education to an eight-bar 4/4 melody, dividing into four two-bar phrases. The melody, though, is lifted from a 1900 Japanese song, “*Tetsudo shōka/Railroad Song*” (Byeon 2001, 42). The connection to Japan is evident in the term for school songs, *ch'angga*, which is the Korean pronunciation of Japanese *shōka*—songs popularized from the 1880s onward across the Japanese archipelago (Han Myōnghŭi 1985, 417; No Tongŭn 1995, 590). Lasting memories of colonial injustice mean that Korean commentators resist pointing to Japanese influence, so while the moniker “revolutionary song” suffices in Pyongyang, today's South Korean musicologists prefer to ally the developments of such Western-style songs to the spread of Christianity. In South Korea we hear, for instance, how Kim Inshik attended mission school in Pyongyang and, although later known as a violinist and composer, he learned to play the harmonium during early music lessons with two missionaries, a Mrs. Hunt and a Mrs. Snooks (Taehan min'guk yesulwŏn 1988, 2, 187–88). Christian hymns were duplicated in Seoul as early as 1888 at the Ewha School, run by Methodist missionaries, where Mrs. Mary Scranton taught singing, and what is generally regarded as the first Korean hymnbook, *Ch'annmiga*, dates to 1892. In place of four-part harmony, the hymns promoted in Korea tended to use regularly parsed unison melodies that lent themselves to harmonium accompaniments; many were imported from the North American evangelical revival of a few years before, of the kind collected in Sankey and Moody's 1877 *Sacred Songs and Solos* (Yi Yusŏn and Yi Sangman 1984, 479–80; Yi Kōnyong 1987, 147–85; Min Kyōngbae 1997, 25–43).

### Songs and song composers

Generally speaking, composers who fared best in Pyongyang were those associated primarily with songs rather than instrumental or orchestral works. The colonial period had, though, seen the beginnings of a local adoption of (and training for) the Enlightenment's cult of the composer, in which status accrued to those who created instrumental and orchestral music.<sup>23</sup> In fact, this remained the case after 1945, as North Korea looked to the Soviet Union,

but, as Chapter 8 will touch on, by the mid-1960s, songs and compositions based on them had replaced symphonies, quartets, and other abstract forms. Why? First, the ephemeral nature of music exposes it to criticism, because the abstraction and plasticity of sound requires interpretation. When music is considered a form of language, whether enigmatic, ambiguous, analyzable, or programmatic, explanations are expected.<sup>24</sup> And when sound is considered in aesthetic terms, as Richard Adlington (2013a, 5) notes, composers readily attract negative attention. As Barbara Mittler puts it in respect to China, the more complicated and intricate a musical piece is, the more censors regard it with suspicion (1997, 59). Lenin riled against selfish artists who made use of “deliberate vagueness” (Lunacharsky 1967, 259–60),<sup>25</sup> but the distrust of music and attempts to control it go back much further, at least to Aristotle and Plato, and in East Asia to the Confucian classics.

Second, songs are bounded objects, because lyrics impose meaning. The choice of lyrics can, though, still be critiqued: “Apolitical artists are useless; those hostile to the new ideology are dangerous,” is how Arnold Perris has it (1985, 71–72). Dmitri Shostakovich, responding to criticism of his compositions, stated that within Stalin’s Soviet Union, “music [was] no longer an end in itself, but a vital weapon in the struggle” (cited in Schwarz 1983, 130). In much the same vein, Kim Jong Il commented that “music without politics is like a flower without scent” (cited in Yi Hyönju 2006b, 167). In songs, clarity is given by lyrics, and when an orchestral or instrumental work is based on a song, it can be claimed to retain the meaning of the lyrics.<sup>26</sup>

In reality, the fortunes of North Korean composers depended on a variety of factors, none of which were consistently applied. In his 1975 speech, Kim Jong Il commented on this:

Our creators of music do not accept Party policy with sensitivity. I gave them the task of composing powerful songs capable of inspiring the masses . . . but as yet they have failed to produce a good song . . . Our music creators are unable to compose even a good march.

Composers, however, could never be on firm ground:

As I have constantly emphasized, creation should never be repetitive. In creation, similarity and repetition mean death. We cannot call that which plagiarizes melodies from other songs . . . creative work.

Over the next few pages, to explore how different composers fared, I look at the careers of two, Ri Myönsang (1908–1989) and Ri Kōnu (1919–1998).



Ri Myönsang grasped the advantage of composing songs *for* and *of* the people with ideological lyrics, and quickly came to occupy a central position in Pyongyang.<sup>27</sup> In 1946 he celebrated socialist construction in “*Sanöþ kõnguk üi norae*/Song of Industrial Construction,” and a year later articulated the triumph of socialism in “*Süngni üi 5-wöl*/May Victory” and “*Süngni üi kõryul*/Road of Victory.” In 1948 he proclaimed the new world in “*Sae pom üi norae*/Song of the New Spring.” And in 1952, during the Korean War, he reminded people of their hometowns in “*Nae kohyang üi chöngdün chip*/Affection for My Hometown House,” announced the new dawn to come in “*Pom norae*/Spring Song,” and commemorated Kim Il Sung’s role in a 1937 guerrilla incursion against Japanese forces in “*Amnokkang ichölli*/Amnok River 2,000-ri.”<sup>28</sup> Of note, one of Ri’s wartime songs, “*Chungguk inmin chiwöngun chän’gal*/Chinese People’s Volunteer Army Praise Song,”<sup>29</sup> was suppressed after a rewrite of the conflict’s history minimized Chinese involvement. These are songs *of* the people, easy to sing, fitting the revolutionary song and school song mold. So, too, are his later “*Kim Ilsöng wönsunim manse*/Long Live Great General Kim Il Sung” (1974) and “*A! Suryöngnim p’umiyö*/Oh! The Great Leader’s Embrace” (1969), which both occupy prominent positions in song collections. His rewards, after being appointed “merit artist” (or “laudatory artist,” *konghun paeu* or *konghun yesulga*) in 1955 and people’s artist in 1961, were the Kim Il Sung Prize in 1972, and, unique among composers, a place for eternity alongside guerrilla fighters and political figures in the Mount Taesöng Revolutionary Martyrs’ Cemetery (Taesöngsan hyöngmyöng ryölsarüng).

Ri learned his craft during colonial times, when Japan controlled Korea.<sup>30</sup> He was born in South Hamgyöng Province, within the borders of today’s northern state, and traveled to Japan in 1930 to study piano. Insufficient funds meant he temporarily gave up, but he soon returned to Tokyo, where he trained until 1933. It is reported that he could not find a teaching job (Chang Yöngchöl 1998, 305), so he had to take on other work. He was, though, in the right place, and after his first song was published that same year (1933), he began to compose for record labels headquartered in Japan, such as Polydor and Victor. In the 1930s, the rapidly growing recording industry meant Ri composed for specialist singers—by definition, songs *for* the people—working within two commercial genres aimed at the Korean market, *shin minyo* (new folk songs) and *taejung kayo* (popular songs), and liaising with Korean agencies (*munyebru*) set up by labels.

By way of background, when Japan declared Korea its colony in 1910, its first recording company, Nihon Chikuonki Shökai (Nipponophone), already existed. Shortly thereafter, it seems an agreement was concluded confining European and American recording companies to China, but giving



Japanese-based companies (even where set up by foreigners, as Nipponophone had been) a monopoly over Japanese territories, including Korea. In Korea, because recordings were initially the icing that encouraged people to buy expensive gramophone equipment, the market was the preserve of a largely Japanese mercantile elite until, from the mid-1920s onward, it became financially worthwhile to target Koreans. However, through the 1930s, recording studios were almost all in Japan, and Korean singers traveled to Tokyo and Osaka to record (Pak Ch'anho 1992, 170–75; Yi Yŏngmi 1998, 50, 78–87; Yamauchi 2009, 118–21; Gloria Lee Pak 2006, 65). Ri joined the arrangers, backing musicians, and composers who congregated around the studios.

As a Korean genre, *shin minyo* was first announced in the *Chosŏn ilbo* (*Korean Daily News*) in March 1931. *Shin minyo* typically blended compound Korean rhythmic cycles with instrumental accompaniments that might feature traditional instruments but more usually used the then-popular Western dance band. A Japanese genre, *shin minyō*, predated the Korean equivalent, but was distinctly nationalist. Where Japanese *shin minyō* were often commissioned by schools and factories, the Korean genre was a commercial proposition (Yi Chinwŏn 1997, 372–88; Pak Ch'anho 1992, 229; Kim Chŏmdo 1995; Finchum-Sung 2006).<sup>31</sup> The second genre aimed at the Korean market was *taejung kayo*, a popular style commonly referred to in the 1930s as *yuhaengga* (songs in fashion). This was the Korean equivalent of Japanese *ryūkōka*, a genre that sits behind the still popular Japanese *enka* (Yano 2002, 28–44). The genre is today referred to in South Korea, after its insistent foxtrot rhythm, as *t'ūrōt'ū* or, using onomatopoeia, as *ppongtchak*. The earliest Korean song normally identified within the style is “*Hūimangga*/Song of Aspiration,” written probably in 1923 by an unknown composer and recorded in 1925 as “*I p'ungjin sewŏll*/These Troubled Times” by two courtesans (*kisaeng*). Debates in South Korea continue as to whether and to what extent Korean popular songs were influenced by Japanese equivalents.<sup>32</sup>

Ri also composed songs within a third colonial-era genre, *yesul kagok* (art lyric songs). Northern scholars today refer to such songs simply as “art songs” (*yesul kayo*). These are songs for specialists, for the people, that couple patriotic or sentimental texts to Western diatonic harmony. The first Korean song associated with the genre is Hong Ranp'a's (Hong Yonghu, 1897–1941)<sup>33</sup> “*Pongsŏnhwa*/Balsam Flower,” written in 1919. Illustrating how such songs continued in North Korea, one of Ri's most celebrated songs is firmly anchored to this genre: “*Nuni naerinda*/Snow Falls.” Composed in 1965, the lyrics recount the official story of Kim Il Sung's guerrilla army, camped out in the harsh winter on Mount Paektu on the border with Manchuria. Three lines,

each of four bars duration, form one stanza, the second answering the first and the third functioning as an extended cadence. Slow and sorrowful, the lilting 4/4 accompaniment features a moving bass in C minor counterpointed by falling chord clusters, with a touch of ambiguity added by leading tone  $b\flat$  and  $b\sharp$  alternation (Notation 1.2). The structure, accompaniment, and melodic contour is typical of what had become a standardized form.

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It is in 4/4 time and C minor. The score consists of four systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The lyrics are in Korean and English. Dynamics include *p* (piano) and *mf* (mezzo-forte).

System 1: Vocal line starts with a whole rest, followed by a half note G $\flat$  (Nun -). Piano accompaniment starts with a half note G $\flat$  (p), followed by a half note A $\flat$  (p), and then a half note B $\flat$  (mf).

System 2: Vocal line: i - nae - rin - da, hwin nun - i nae - rin - da, Ppal - (mf). Piano accompaniment: p (p), followed by a half note A $\flat$  (p), and then a half note B $\flat$  (mf).

System 3: Vocal line: tchi san-i - ya - gi - ro, I pam to kip'ö ka-nün - de, Pul - (mf). Piano accompaniment: mf (mf), followed by a half note A $\flat$  (p), and then a half note B $\flat$  (mf).

System 4: Vocal line: palg - ün ch'ang - mun ka - e, Hwin - nun - i - nae - rin - da. (p). Piano accompaniment: p (p), followed by a half note A $\flat$  (p), and then a half note B $\flat$  (mf).

**Notation 1.2** Ri Myönsang (1908–1989), “Nuni naerinda/Snow Falls” (1965).

Source: Ro Ikhwa 1989, 20–21.

Essentially, North Korea hijacked the three colonial-era song genres because many composers and singers who had specialized in these genres and recorded for Japanese companies settled in Pyongyang.<sup>34</sup> Ri Myönsang traveled back to Seoul at the end of the Pacific War but moved to Pyongyang in May 1946. Ri Kõnu, in contrast, never received the same accolades as Ri Myönsang. He had not been born on territory that became North Korea, but hailed from Kangwõn Province to the east. He graduated later, in 1943, as a violinist and composer, after five years of study in Tokyo. Before then, rather than specializing in songs, a violin work and his orchestral “*Chõngch’un/Youth*” had been premiered at the All Japan Concours in 1941 and 1942. With Japan at war and clamping down on Korean nationalism, he was too late to benefit from the recording industry. Instead, he returned to Korea, where, between 1944 and 1945, he taught at a girl’s high school in Kaesõng, which had been the capital during the Koryõ dynasty (918–1392) and sits just north of today’s DMZ dividing North from South. Politically left-leaning, he joined the Seoul-based Korean Proletariat Music Union (Chosõn p’ürollet’aria ùmak tongmaeng) in 1945. This was soon renamed the Korean Musicians’ Union (Chosõn ùmakka tongmaeng), and, in Seoul in 1947, he became its secretary. He took on the same role for the Korean Artists’ Union (Chosõn yesul chõng tongmaeng), allying himself closely to left-leaning artists and writers. Songs such as “*Haebang chõnsae ùi nora*/Song of the Independence Fighters,” “*Kanün kil/The Way to Go*,” and “*Yõmyõng ùi nora*/New Era Song” promised much, but also hint at why he was arrested by the southern police in 1949 and spent a period in the infamous Sõdaemun prison before being released as northern forces entered Seoul in the early weeks of the Korean War. Along with many others, he moved to Pyongyang,<sup>35</sup> where he later sat on various committees and continued to produce a mixed collection of instrumental works, choral pieces, and songs. He contributed to three revolutionary operas, “*P’i pada/Sea of Blood*” (1971), “*Tang ùi chãmdwin ttal/True Daughter*” (1971), and “*Millima iyagi hara/Oh! Tell the Forest*” (1972),<sup>36</sup> and toward the end of his life he worked at the Isang Yun Music Research Institute.<sup>37</sup>

One of Ri’s most celebrated songs remains “*Urinün charangchàn chõllima chagõppan/Our Pride in the Chõllima Work Party*” (1961), praising a mass campaign underway at the time. Suitably ideological lyrics feature in songs such as “*P’owi sòmmyõl ùi nora*/Song of the Crushing Defeat Siege” (1952), “*Uri ùi charang/Our Pride*” (1952), and “*Poksu ùi nora*/Song of Revenge” (1953). However, only a few of his songs feature in collections, and these were largely written before 1964. One reason is that his composition style was more

suiting to art songs, songs *for* the people, for listening to at concerts rather than for mass participation. “Our Pride,” for instance, features awkward hemiola that cut across the 4/4 march, while it, along with “Revenge” and “*Tongbaek kkot*/Camellia Flower” (1957), shifts meters within stanzas, from duple (2/4) and triple (3/4) to quadruple (4/4). Another song, “*Ch’angsŏngŭn choha*/Ch’angsŏng is Good” (1962), shifts from 6/8 to 9/8. Such shifts make his songs difficult to sing, or to dance or march to. A further statement in Kim Jong Il’s 1975 speech articulates the issue:

Because our composers produce songs without doing any foundation work for creating melodies with specific features, there appear only complicated songs, and no masterpieces.

As much as art songs offered Ri a way forward, with an important collection being published the year before he died (Shim Ŭngshik 1997), these provided ammunition for his critics because they were not *of* the people. “Camellia Flower,” for instance, is at the extreme of what could be tolerated: cast in A♭ major, it includes modulations to a transitory C major (the dominant to the relative minor, F minor) and E♭ major, while metrical irregularity moves from 3/4 to 4/4, with brief occasional forays into 5/4. “*Kohyang ŭi pom*/Hometown Spring” (1958) creates color, but also confusion, by contrasting its solid G minor tonality with a B♭ minor ninth chord and a false cadence modulating to G major. In contrast, “*T’ongil ŭi pommaji*/Unification of Spring” (1993) keeps to a march-like 4/4, but the vocal part shifts between duple and triple beat divisions, while dotted patterns displace the normal speech accents in the lyrics. The themes Ri chose were also varied, reminiscing on places, celebrating work such as fishing, or describing the seasons, rather than focusing solely on ideological matters.

Koen De Ceuster notes how artistic careers in North Korea progress according to how artists work within prescribed stylistic and thematic contexts, not because of the aesthetic quality of what is produced (2011, 69–71, 2013, 160–62). In the formulaic world of popular songs, Ri did not conform. Ultimately, claims about the importance of art, including music, are inherently contradictory, because, although Kim Jong Il wrote on the first page of his 1991 treatise on music that “where there is music, there is life,” he allowed no place for abstraction or for, using Théophile Gautier’s phrase, *l’art pour l’art*. Again, while he repeatedly claimed talent was innate to musicians and artists, and that aesthetic beauty in musical and artistic

output was necessary to generate emotional responses from audiences, Kim left a fundamental question unanswered by not allowing free expression. Pertinently, although not specifically referencing North Korea, Igor Golomstock (1990) has questioned whether it is in fact oxymoronic to talk about totalitarian art.

For the moment, I leave the question hanging, because there is a second reason why Ri never achieved the success of Ri Myönsang: he belonged to the faction of southern artists and writers who settled in Pyongyang, a faction destined to suffer purges in the internecine struggles that accompanied Kim Il Sung's maneuvering to oust potential opposition. In its early years, the regime had little choice but to use the writers and artists—including musicians—who were available. It is not surprising that many came from bourgeois backgrounds, since up to that time careers in the arts had been built on foundations that required funding and time. Funds were needed to pay for teaching, while the time to practice and refine one's skills was a luxury those struggling to put food on a family table could ill afford. It is estimated that more than 100 writers working in the South, roughly a third of those known, moved northward after 1945, along with at least 57 musicians and an unknown number of other artists (Scalapino and Lee 1972, 877; No Tongün 1989, 181; Pihl 1993, 84; Kim Chaeyong 1994, 225). In the South, many had found themselves alienated from the American military authorities. Meanwhile, the Soviets in the North cultivated intellectuals, encouraging cultural and educational development (Armstrong 2003a). Although it has been stated that North Korea had to invent its culture from the bottom up, the reality is that its first generation of writers and artists had trained during the colonial period. Over time, many of these were replaced by more proletarian artists—such as Kim Wŏn'gyun. Also, the factions in Pyongyang, in literature and art as in politics, divided domestic underground Communists, including those previously active in Seoul who had fled northward, from leftist intellectuals who had migrated to China during the colonial period (some spending time at the Chinese Communist operation in Yan'an) and from Soviet Koreans (some of whom were sent back to Pyongyang by the Soviet Union). These three factions balanced their allegiances with a fourth, the anti-Japanese guerrillas from Manchuria, some of whom, as allies of Kim Il Sung, had withdrawn to the Soviet Far East around 1940, and who were "made up preponderantly of the illiterate and indigent" (Lee 1963, 9; Pihl 1993, 94).<sup>38</sup>

Kim initially allowed critics of literature and art to emerge from within the factions. Each faction, however, retained elements of the familiar Confucian hierarchical system of the past, leading to what Brian Myers refers to as a “patrimonial functioning of [the] cultural apparatus” (1994, 151).<sup>39</sup> Hence, much as had occurred in Moscow beginning in the late 1920s under the culture commissar and playwright Anatoly Lunacharsky (Fairclough 2016, 5), some artists found themselves criticized, while some were protected.<sup>40</sup> Other composers from Seoul shared Ri Kõnu’s experience, including An Kiyõng (1900–1980) and Kim Sunnam (1917–1986). In Seoul in 1945, An had written a song specifically celebrating liberation, “*Haebang chõnsa ïi norael*/Song of the Liberation War,”<sup>41</sup> but he could never be fully trusted because he had spent time from 1925 studying in the United States. After moving to Pyongyang, he taught singing at the Pyongyang Music College, writing songs that vacillated between ideology and the everyday, from “*Arũmdaun kõri*/Beautiful Way” and “*Kim changgun ïi hoso pattũlgo*/Accepting General Kim’s Petition” to the folksy “*Tõdõrijang*” and “*Hae paragi*/Sunflowers.” Kim Sunnam had graduated from Tokyo in 1942, and back in Seoul he organized left-leaning musicians until he came to the attention of the southern police. His “*Inmin hangjaengga*/Song of People’s Resistance” and “*Kõnguk haengjin’gok*/Foundation March for the Nation” are 4/4 and 2/4 marches, while his “*Sanyuhwa*/Mountain Flower” is an art song. He moved northward in 1947 and was sent to Moscow to study under Khachaturian in 1952.<sup>42</sup> A year later he moved to Leningrad, but was ordered back later that same year. Han Sõrya, the writer who led the southern faction, soon accused him of neglecting Korean roots in his promotion of foreign music (Szalontai 2005, 40–42), and composers faithfully lined up to criticize him, with both Mun Chongsang and Wõn Hũngnyong writing scathing accounts of his works in the journal *Chosõn ïmak* (1956/2, 58–65, 1956/3, 65–79). Exiled to Shinpõ in South Hamgyõng Province, he was permitted to write only folk song arrangements. His career resumed in the mid-1960s. He was praised in *Chosõn ïmak* (1964/4), and by 1966 he was back teaching at the Pyongyang Music College.

### Songs assembled for the concert stage

How could songs be knitted together for staged presentation? The Chinese looked to Soviet army ensembles and massed Cossack choirs to learn how to

do so (Scott 1963, 134–52), and, as they did, the Paris Conservatory-trained Xian Xinghai (1905–1945) took a leading role. Xian joined the Communists at Yan'an in 1938, negotiating "China's profound ambivalence toward Western culture" (Kraus 1989, 40) as he composed songs and cantatas with patriotic themes.<sup>43</sup> The celebrated "*Huanghe dahechang*/Yellow River Cantata" (1939), later arranged by others as a concerto, was his "romantic panegyric on the Chinese people and their glorious revolution" (Mittler 1997, 30), and could certainly have been a model for North Korea, not least because Xian's colleague at Yan'an, Chǒng Ryulsǒng (1914–1976, C. Zheng Lucheng), taught in Pyongyang until the start of the Korean War.<sup>44</sup> Nie Er's (Nie Shouxin, 1912–1935) "*Yiyongjun jinxingqu*/March of the Volunteers," written for a patriotic film in 1935, and in 1949 adapted as the national anthem for the People's Republic of China, offered a further model, but on a smaller scale: it opens with a diatonic melody built around regular four-bar phrases, the first phrase, patterned after "The Internationale," incorporates pentatonic and rhythmic elements that evoke Chinese tradition, and sets ideological lyrics about workers (Malm 1977, 168; Wong 1984, 120). In North Korea, then, as with revolutionary songs, Chinese and Soviet influence is apparent.

But "song theater" productions had been produced during the colonial period (Chōe 2003, 107–34), and the first acknowledged cantata in the northern state, Kim Oksǒng's (1916–1965) "*Amnokkang*/Amnok River" (1949), harnesses musical styles leftover from that time. Kim intersperses local folk songs with new folk song elements (particularly in the third movement); with art songs sung by soprano, tenor, and bass soloists; and with revolutionary songs arranged for choir and orchestra. The orchestra includes a Western brass section that supports more militaristic episodes and marches, and lyrical vocal lines feature Western string and woodwind accompaniments.<sup>45</sup> Kim Oksǒng was familiar with all these elements. Western brass bands had first been encountered by Koreans in the late nineteenth century as Western vessels began to call at Korea's ports, seeking trade concessions and coaling facilities. The Tuned Bugle Force (Kokhodaē) had been set up in 1888 by three Americans, but a full military band was established in 1901, directed by the German Franz Eckert (1852–1916). The band gave its first concert at the king's birthday celebrations in Seoul in September (Yi Yusǒn and Yi Sangman 1984, 486; No Tongūn 1989, 133–37, 1995, 396). During the colonial period, various bands were established across Korea and Manchuria, and Kim had taken a job composing for the army band in Kyōngsang, in northeastern Hwanghae Province, shortly after liberation. Again, he knew local folk songs



because, as a native of Hwanghae, he had been fascinated by the fishing songs he encountered at the coast during his childhood—it is reported that his mother was a *haenyō*, a woman diver.<sup>46</sup> Again, from 1940 onward, he worked as a violinist in Kyōngsang and Haeju. He also wrote songs in the popular *taejung kayo* style for his 1945 opera “*Rangnang kongju/Princess Rangnang*.” The components in his cantata, then, are all to be found in his background and experience. And he fitted the proletarian label that the regime desired, by virtue of his local training and career. Most of his subsequent compositions were songs;<sup>47</sup> appointed merit artist in 1955 and people’s artist in 1961, from 1956 to 1960 he served as vice president of the Korean Composers’ Union.

“Amnok River” sets lyrics lifted from a long poem by Cho Kichōn, “*Paektusan/Mount Paektu*,” particularly its sixth section, describing how guerrillas under Kim Il Sung crossed the Amnok (Yalu) River to reach the town of Pochōnbo, where they routed and killed the resident Japanese police force (Pae In’gyo 2010). The battle is central to Kim Il Sung’s leadership cult, and is memorialized in the Revolutionary Museum in Pyongyang, where a hall is given over to a multimedia reenactment: at 10:00 p.m. on June 3, 1937, Kim fired a bullet to signal the attack. His guerrillas only held the town for a day before retreating, but, in his memoir, *With the Century*, Kim Il Sung remarks that the battle showed how the Japanese imperialists could be “smashed and burnt up, like rubbish,” giving Koreans confidence to fight colonialism and achieve national liberation. The central importance that the battle has assumed illustrates a common issue with the official history, where discrepancies exist between events and their interpretation.<sup>48</sup>

The official history also has it that Mount Paektu (lit., “White Mountain”; C. Changbaishan, “Long White Mountain”) is where Kim had his guerrilla base. Its central place in official history means it will feature many times in this volume, hence I offer a few words about it here. Mount Paektu is an extinct volcano that sits on the border between North Korea and China (or, in the 1930s, with Japanese-controlled Manchuria), with a lake in its crater that forms the source for the two rivers marking the border to east and west, the Tumen and Amnok/Yalu.<sup>49</sup> It is where legend has it that the founder of Korea, Tan’gun, was born, the offspring of a heavenly deity and a bear-turned-woman. Although the Korean peninsula was first settled some 30,000 years ago, the legend is that Tan’gun served as ruler from 2333–1122 BCE, until, at least according to some tellings, he assumed spirit form and disappeared.<sup>50</sup> According to the official account, Mount Paektu was where Kim Jong Il was born, as birds sang praises and as a double rainbow and a



new star appeared. Although commentators point out that he was actually born as Yurei Ilsenovitch Kim in Vyatskoye, in Soviet territory, after Kim Il Sung had retreated from Japanese-controlled Manchuria,<sup>51</sup> Mount Paektu remains a place of pilgrimage for northern citizens. It is where Kim Jong Un, like his father and grandfather before him, regularly poses for photographs.

“Amnok River” provided the blueprint for subsequent North Korean cantatas. So, 20 years later, as Pyongyang’s cultural commissars sought new ways to stage songs, cantatas that mixed old and new songs were still being championed. “Embrace of the Motherland,” for example, became the central song for an “immortal masterwork” of the same name, adding new songs by young proletarian composers: Hŏ Kŭmjong (b. 1941), Yu Myŏngchŏn (b. 1945), Sŏn Ch’angse (1934–1981), Ri Yongho (b. 1945), Ŏm Hajin (b. 1943), Pak Mujun (b. 1942), and Sŏng Tongch’un (b. 1937). Trained after Korea’s division, these indicate what proletarian composers were now expected to be. Pak had been born in Seoul, but all the others hailed from northern territory, from North Hamgyŏng Province (Hŏ, Ŏm), South Hamgyŏng (Sŏn, Ri), Pyongyang (Yu), and today’s Ryanggang, near the border with China (Sŏng). Their careers followed similar paths. Hŏ, for example, entered college in Pyongyang in 1959, and upon graduation in 1965 was appointed composer for the Korean People’s Army Ensemble (Chosŏn inmin’gun hyŏpchudan).<sup>52</sup> There, he was one of the collective who wrote the music for the revolutionary opera “True Daughter” (1971; see Chapter 4). Then, for the Sea of Blood Opera Company, he contributed to “*Kkot panŭn chŏnyŏ/The Flower Girl*” (1972). In 1989 he was appointed a people’s artist. Likewise, Sŏng entered college as an instrumentalist in 1953, graduating in 1959. He switched to composition for graduate study, and from 1962 worked at the National People’s Arts Theater (Kungnip minjok yesul kŭkch’ang). He composed music for films, including “The Flower Girl” (1972) in the year he was appointed a people’s artist, and his song “*Suryŏngnim ŭi mansu mugang ch’ugwŏnhamnida/Long Life Congratulations to the Great Leader*” has a status just below “Song of General Kim Il Sung.”

In their songs for the cantata, both Hŏ and Sŏng explore Kim Il Sung’s association with Mount Paektu. Hŏ sets lyrics by Chŏn Pyŏnggu about slogans carved on trees supposedly by members of the women’s volunteer force, and Sŏng recalls, through lyrics by Ri Chongsul, the legendary pledges of guerrillas fighting under Kim:

In the thick green forest of Chŏngbong,  
Where azaleas bloom in spring,

Letters symbolic of the country's liberation  
 Written by the Anti-Japanese women's fighters radiate bright  
 hopes. (Hö, "*Chöngbong üi külbai*/Letters Written on the Trees in  
 Chöngbong")

The road of revolution is attended with glories and severe ordeals,  
 How can we cover the long distance but for the faith planted by our  
 mother Party?  
 The pledge the fighter once took is dearer than life:  
 We will singleheartedly share our fate with our Party. (Söng, "*Uri üi  
 shinnyömmün hana*/We Have One Faith")

With ideology forcing monochromatic production, by the late 1970s  
 cantatas had expanded into music-and-dance works.<sup>53</sup> One such work,  
 "*Nagwön üi norae*/Song of Paradise" (1977),<sup>54</sup> still describes secret guerrilla  
 camps, but now paints them from a quasi-utopian present:

In the days of battle against Japan, our fatherly leader  
 Was so anxious to give apples to the children's corps.  
 Wherever you go in my homeland,  
 The flowers of his great love are blooming. ("*Suryöngnim p'yölchöjushin  
 kwasu üi nara*/The Country of Orchards the Leader Unfolded"<sup>55</sup>)

When our country was shrouded by the dark clouds of Japanese invasion  
 And plunged into utter darkness of despair,  
 The General's Star rose high to shed the light of liberation:  
 Shine, sacred Mount Paektu, the glory of Korea! ("*Chöllanhada  
 Paektu söngsan*/Shine, Sacred Mount Paektu")

"Song of Paradise" mixes songs with dance, and includes dialogue narrated  
 by a female journalist to move the action along. It opens with women workers  
 dancing, proceeds through scenes of farming and fishing and through songs  
 and dances set against backdrops of Mount Kūmgang (Diamond Mountain)  
 and Mount Paektu, then to textile mills and steel works, ending with people  
 singing and dancing in Pyongyang (Cornell 2002, 33–37). The oratorio-like  
 "*Tongjiae üi norae*/Song of Comradeship" (1982), with five episodes written  
 by Söng Tongch'un and Ri Hapö'm (b. 1938) to lyrics by Ri Chongsun, Paek  
 Injun, and Ri Chongsul, embraces even more history, as does "*Konan üi*

*haenggun*/March of Trouble” (1982). This last is subtitled a “revolutionary music and dance poetic drama” (*hyŏngmyŏngjŏk ūmak muyong sŏsa shigŭk*), as is the unattributed “*Amnokkangban ūi hwaebul*/The Amnok Riverbank Beacon” (1982), which rewrites Kim Oksŏng’s “Amnok River,” adding to its massive 518-page scorebook glossy illustrations showing the battle and detailing the route Kim Il Sung’s guerrillas took from Mount Paektu to Pochŏnbo and back.

### Songs to build the state

In the mid-1950s, the Chŏllima campaign referred to in the title of Ri Kŏnu’s 1961 song began. The first song I have identified with “*Chŏllima*” in its title, “*Urinŭn chŏllima t’ago tallinda*/Ride and Run Our Chŏllima,” was co-written by Kim Wŏngyun and Cho Kilsŏk (1926–1996) in 1958, and the movement begins to be discussed in the journal *Chosŏn ūmak* (1959/1, 23) only in January 1959, although this article announces, intriguingly, that 1959 is the fifth year since Kim Il Sung announced the policy (that is, in 1955). The year 1961 saw a volume of songs published for the movement, *Chŏllima ūi norae*. Although the campaign was destined to have wide-reaching consequences for music, this was not the initial intention. Rather, Chŏllima began as a campaign to rapidly boost productivity while reducing Soviet and Chinese influence. Monochromatic repetition was key, rendering “the mundaneness of everyday life . . . extraordinary” (Kim Cheehyung 2018, 102); ideology repeatedly presented the hegemony of Kim’s leadership as the most ordinary thing. Chŏllima, then, also had a subsidiary function: to root out residual opposition to Kim Il Sung’s autocracy. Peter Moody cites two of Kim Il Sung’s speeches from 1958:

Conservatives . . . attempt to paralyze the creative initiative of the working people by holding up the norms of others. . . . We are now moving forward at the speed of Chollima [Chŏllima], but old things are holding us back . . . We are eager to make progress every day and every hour, but conservatives . . . and passive elements are trying to dampen our enthusiasm and spirit. (Moody 2013, 224–25, citing Kim Il Sung, *Collected Works* 12 [1983], 448, 508)

Often transliterated as the “flying horse movement,” Chŏllima harnessed the image of a mythical horse (*ma*) able to gallop a thousand (*chŏn/chŏl-*)

“miles” (*ri/-li*) in a day—the Korean peninsula north to south is around 1,200 kilometers, and is measured in both the “Patriotic Song” and the South Korean equivalent anthem as 3,000 *ri*, so the horse could cover around 400 kilometers daily.<sup>56</sup> The image may have been taken from a fourteenth-century Chinese novel, linking back to Turkic legends about richly caparisoned flying horses that possessed amazing stamina.<sup>57</sup> The movement, according to retrospective northern texts, began in December 1956 (rather than *Chosŏn ūmak*’s claim of 1955), when Kim gave a speech at the Kangsŏn steel mill exhorting managers to mobilize workers to greater production. However, commentators, noting similarities with China’s Great Leap Forward, suggest this backdates the actual history.<sup>58</sup> Certainly, however, although the Korean War and its aftermath had given Kim an opportunity to eliminate potential opposition from the domestic faction (such as Pak Hŏnyŏng, its leader and the North’s former vice president, who was arrested in February 1953 and later shot, accused of spying for America), by 1956 he recognized a looming threat to his authority. This came primarily from a Soviet Union that, after the death of Stalin, was beginning to reform (Lankov 1999; Szalontai 2005). In February 1956, Khrushchev confirmed the Soviet de-Stalinization campaign in his “secret” speech. During the summer, watching Soviet events unfold, residual members of the Yan’an and Soviet factions in Pyongyang sought to limit Kim’s authority by imposing a collective leadership. Then, in the autumn, the Soviets refused to provide aid to support Kim’s new five-year economic plan (Jin 2012; Armstrong 2013, 79–111, 2014, 42–45).

Chŏllima also built on experience. Pyongyang had explored mass mobilization in the late 1940s, as it sought to harness something of the Soviet Stakhanovite movement of the 1930s. Pyongyang championed a Korean, Kim Hoeil, a train engineer, as the equivalent to the Soviet miner Stakhanov, who reputedly moved 102 tons of coal in a shift.<sup>59</sup> Recognizing the merits of individual workers, “people’s workers” (*inmin nodongja*) were appointed, with artists and musicians like Kim Wŏngyun and Ri Myŏnsang, as already noted, receiving parallel designations as merit artists and people’s artists. Music was part of Chŏllima’s mobilization process: singers and bands were sent to encourage workers in factories and at work sites. Analogous to Mao’s “Mass Line,” the campaign evolved what Andrew Walder refers to as “organized dependence,” through which workers became reliant “economically on their enterprises, politically on the part of management, and personally on supervisors” (1998, 13). As this happened, dependence became ordinary—the everyday reality. This was also the case for artists, including musicians,

as art became increasingly monothematic, dependent on and using genre conventions to repeatedly frame the same official history of Kim Il Sung’s exploits and achievements, and to constantly repeat the same ideological content. Art, then, was to be ordinary and everyday, but also exceptional.

For music, standardization also came as the implications of a speech Kim delivered on December 28, 1955, “On eliminating dogmatism and formalism and establishing *juche* in ideological work” (the “*juche* speech”), were worked out.<sup>60</sup> While discussion of *juche* as it matured into an ideology for cultural production must wait until Chapter 4, for the moment note that both the speech and the Ch’ŏllima campaign made Kim sole arbiter. This was achieved with the dogma of *yuil sasang* (single/unitary ideology), which made Kim’s actions and statements identical to the wishes and desires of the people. Essentially, both the speech and the campaign delinked Korea from international influence and reinforced a nationalistic binary worldview of Korea-and-the-rest (Jae-Jung Suh 2013, 8–15). The speech, though, retained Stalin’s autarkic economic model of socialism in one country, thereby fashioning, through the campaign, a Korean approach to socialist state-building (Suh 1988; Gittings 1993; David-West 2007, 130–41). The speech took literature as its focus, criticizing, for example, the writer Pak Ch’angok for associating with bourgeois reactionaries, for failing to learn from Korean history and culture, and for not knowing how to properly use the Korean language. These same themes, however, match the criticisms already leveled at the composer Kim Sunnam.

Kim also stated,

We have so far failed to take measures for a systematic study of our country’s history and national culture . . . Every effort should be made to unearth our national legacies and carry them forward. (*Selected Works* 1, 1971, 590)

Responding to Kim’s call, and as was done in Mao’s “100 Flowers” campaign in China, musicologists were sent to the countryside to collect folk songs (*minyo*).<sup>61</sup> Folk song collection movements had roots in Europe, and in nineteenth-century Russia, where folk songs had become material sources and the inspiration for nationalist composers. In Russia, many anthologies had been published, alongside copious discussions of typicality in melodies, modes, cadences, and rhythms, and how these could be captured in arrangements and compositions.<sup>62</sup> In 1918 Boris Krasin’s report on the Music Section of the Moscow Proletkult invoked the folk song genre, which,

was created in different times and with a different consciousness, but even so, it almost always gave expression to a longing for future freedom . . .

This is why folk song, which is comprehensible to the people, can be the starting point for the new musical creation of the proletariat. (Translated in Frolova-Walker and Walker 2012, 16)

In Mao's China, the question became how to utilize folk songs for socialist development.

### Songs built on the foundations of folk songs

In colonial-era Korea, the composer An Kiyŏng published folk song notations, as "*Chosŏn minyowa akpohwa*," in the journal *Tonggwang* (*Eastern Light*) in May 1931. Other composers also contributed folk song transcriptions; Isang Yun, for instance, completed a set of arrangements in 1941. In 1954, a year before the *juche* speech, the Korean Composers' Union had commissioned a set of transcriptions from, among others, Ro Myŏngjuk, Ra Wŏnsŏp, and Cho Ryŏngch'ul.<sup>63</sup> Now, following Kim's directive, folk songs were to be collected, analyzed, and utilized. Several dozen scholars were sent out to collect multiple examples of songs from aging singers across the country. Four large volumes were prepared, predating any similarly expansive project in South Korea:<sup>64</sup> *Chosŏn minjok ūmak chŏnjip: minyo p'yŏn* (Korean National Music Collection: Folk Song Volumes) (1958–1959, reissued 1998–1999). Ri Ch'anggu recalled to me in June 1992 that these volumes were primarily intended as study aids:

In the 1950s, there were many old people in the countryside, but they have all died now. In the old days, we used hand tools while farming, but no more.<sup>65</sup> Our society keeps modernizing, and our lifestyle has changed much. It is hard to find people who still perform in the old style. The job of scholars is to preserve folk songs.

The volumes identify both singers and their hometowns (or, in the case of singers originally from South Korea, their home provinces). For the first volume, those charged with carrying out the project were led by the youthful composer Sŏng Tongch'un and focused on agricultural songs for rice paddies (*non*) and dry fields (*pat*). The first volume contains 25 versions of "*Nongbuga*/Farming Song," although this vague title, which probably came into use a century earlier during an 1870s campaign to promote agriculture,<sup>66</sup> is applied to many different work activities, so there is little connection between discrete songs. Volume 2 offers many folk songs from the region surrounding Pyongyang, known as *Sŏdo sori* (Western province songs),

but these had formerly been associated with courtesans more than farmers and commoners. Among nine versions of the representative "*Sushimgal*/Song of Sorrow," three are transcribed by Han Shihyŏng and smooth out ornamentation, while six transcribed by Ch'a Sŭngjin retain a greater level of complexity. By the third and fourth volumes, the concentration is on songs associated with professional singers that had been created and popularized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including a multitude of songs with the suffix "*t'aryŏng*" and the early recording industry's *shin minyo* (as also evidenced in Ch'oe Ch'angho 2003, 38–42): "*Nilliri*" or "*Nilliriya*" and "*Tondollari*," featuring lexically meaningless or onomatopoeic syllables in both titles and lyrics; "*Saeya, saeya*/Bird, Bird;" and versions of the widespread "*Arirang*." Briefly stated, folk songs of the people constitute local songs for work, play and death, and have been identified in collections as *hyangt'o* (native), *chŏnt'ong* (traditional), or *t'osok* (of the folk).<sup>67</sup> In contrast, popular and populist songs designed for urban stages and the recording industry began as folk songs for the people, and have often been referred to as *t'ongsok* (common). Korean folklorists have, since the colonial period, tended to work with the former, but much musicology, in both South and North Korea, and matching the interests of the recording industry, has concentrated on the latter (Howard 2006b, 81–88).<sup>68</sup>

Kim Il Sung called for the vernacular to be recovered, but he required it to be enriched (Kim Yol Kyu 1992, 88). As Kim Jong Il later put it:

Developing music on the basis of our national melodies should not be understood as simply reviving the folk melodies of the past . . . folk songs are the cream of national music . . . [but] even folk songs created by the people may contain backward elements . . . We must discard the outmoded and reactionary, and preserve the progressive and popular, while modifying or developing them to meet our contemporary class requirements and aesthetic tastes. (*On the Art of Music*, 2006 [1991], 388–89<sup>69</sup>)

Work, then, was required to create a national style. This would iron out regional distinctions, but still must claim to inherit the tradition (the result, visually, is illustrated in Figure 1.2):

Singers today sing folk songs in a modern way. They should learn the old styles, even though they only sing in the modern way. This allows them to sing, based on the folk songs of old, but in a modern way suitable for today's Koreans. (Ri Ch'anggu, July 1992)





**Figure 1.2** Folksong performance at Man'gyŏngdae Children's Palace, 2000. Photo by Keith Howard.

Ri's comment indicates that the distinctions of vocal style maintained in China, between folk singers and singers of art songs, became blurred as North Korea recast all songs as popular and populist. The transcriptions in the four 1958–1959 volumes proved essential for the updating process, a process that progressed through several stages.<sup>70</sup> First, much ornamentation was removed. Note that European folk song notators and their ethnomusical cousins have long argued about whether to remove ornamentation, to “smooth out” individual traits and leave only “fundamental” melodies.<sup>71</sup> But traditional Korean music—including *minsok ŭmak* or *min'gan ŭmak* as used during the colonial period in Korea to denote “folk music”—was, and still is in South Korea, characterized by a high concentration of ornamentation. Ornamentation includes pre-tone appoggiature and acciaccature, pitch bending rather than holding a steady tone through the duration of a note, and post-tone fades, glissandi, and portamenti. It is integral and is expected rather than being a matter of individual taste.

Second, as songs were transcribed using the Western five-line staff, vocal quality was ignored. Consider Korea's southwestern Namdo region, where the concept known as *aewan ch'ang* (sad voice) was widespread. To provide this, the typical voice was strained and tense, and specific tones were treated in particular ways. The most representative song, “*Yukchabaegi*,” used a mode that mixed “breaking tones” (*kkŏngnŭn mok*) sliding downward from mediant to supertonic and a low dominant “vibrating tone” (*ttŏnŭn mok*)<sup>72</sup>



with a steady tonic with little or no vibrato. In contrast, northwestern *Sōdo sori*, with “*Sushimga*” the most representative song, were full of emotion, and this was imparted using nasal resonance and a coarse, tight throat—the opposite of Western *bel canto*. A singer would end phrases with pathetic portamenti, sighs in which the voice faded to nothing, and, again, she would treat specific tones in particular ways: a high mediant was typically sung flat and rose from a low, steady dominant through a highly vibrated central tone.<sup>73</sup> Today, *Sōdo sori* are preserved publicly not in North Korea, but by migrants in South Korea, where they are protected as National Intangible Cultural Property (*Kukka muhyōng munhwajae*) 29. There, they “take on the patina of the sacred . . . and echo as a prayer for the resolution of years of national and familial division,” the vocal quality supposedly shaped by the long, cold winters of the northwest, and by a history of rebellion and oppression (Pilzer 2003, 68, 78; see also Howard 2006b, 93–96). As distinct as these two regional styles once were, they use the same pitch components: tonic, with supertonic and/or mediant above and dominant below. So, when transcribed without reference to vocal quality, they merge into one, losing their distinctiveness.<sup>74</sup>

Third, transcriptions were used to generate a theory, as outlined in Ri Chànggu’s monograph (1990). Ri describes regional characteristics in terms of mode. Much the same has routinely been done in South Korea,<sup>75</sup> but Ri reduces multiple modes to two underlying pentatonic archetypes, *p’yōngjo* and *kyemyōnjo*, which he defines as equivalent to Western major and minor scales (1990, 5–53). He then notes that some pentatonic pitches would often be sung sharper or flatter than Western equal-tempered equivalents, pulling the melodic contour up or down (1990, 90–111). By combining this with the observation that many singers added leading tones outside the pentatonic palette, he finds an underlying hexatonicism, and thereby prepares the ground for adopting the (Western) heptatonic scale system. This moves from Korean tradition—and the negative ideological aspects of what speeches by both Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il refer to as “resurrectionism” and “revivalism”—to a modernity that matches Korean to Western music (1990, 111–80). Then, Ri identifies common melodic phrases, claiming these as characteristic, particularly a *kyemyōnjo* rising g-c-d-*eb*-d and a *p’yōngjo* rising and falling e-g-a-g-a-e.<sup>76</sup> Duly theorized, templates for new folk songs, and how to create instrumental arrangements and accompaniments for folk songs, were established, and these are retrospectively retained in the unattributed *Chuch’ejōk kiak ūmagesō ūi poksōng* (Folk Song in Juche-Style Instrumental Music) (2001) and also by Hwang Minmyōng et al (2002).<sup>77</sup>

A problem remained. Kim Il Sung stated that folk songs local to the north-west should be prioritized (Han and Chŏng 1983, 502), but he referred to such songs as soft and lyrical. In Kim Jong Il's words, they were "gentle and yet beautiful and elegant," "light and clear."<sup>78</sup> This confused the popular and pan-Korean folk songs *for* the people with the emotional, vibrato-laden, sad and sobbing *Sŏdo sori* that were more local to the countryside around Pyongyang. At first, the dilemma was resolved by dividing local folk songs into two, differentiating songs associated more with the courtesan tradition from those for farming, fishing, and other local activities. The first became associated with a solo tradition, slow and languid, that was claimed to be disliked by the people, and, hence, were not to be part of the contemporary reality.<sup>79</sup> But the second type were claimed to be liked by the people, and so could be sung by all (Yi Yongdŭk and Sŏ Chaegyŏng 2013, 31). The first group faded, leaving the second.<sup>80</sup> Then, over time, "soft," "lyrical," "elegant," popular, and pan-Korean folk songs replaced the local, supplemented by new songs created using the theorized template. Consider, for example, the 1979 collection *Chosŏn minyo kokchip*,<sup>81</sup> where the first two "folk songs" in the first volume of the collection stretch any definition of "traditional": "*Suryŏngnim ūndŏgŭro taep'ungi tŭrŏnne*/A Great Harvest Comes Because of the Great Leader's Benefice" and "*Sae pomŭl noraehane*/Let's Sing the Song of the New Spring"—that is, the new spring brought by Kim Il Sung's leadership. Chŏe Kijŏng (2013, 5–24) confirms that the folk song category omitted "*Sushimga*" and its ilk after folk songs were defined as *of* the people, but somewhat curiously he lists only popular and pan-Korean songs (2013, 25–33), even though he later mentions local songs for farming, death, and village life. He dates one farming song back to Koryŏ times (918–1392) when he asserts that songs were differentiated according to whether they were used for work (*rodong minyo*), for social activities (*saenghwal set'ae*), or for sociopolitical commentary (*sahoe chŏngch'i minyo*). Without offering evidence, and even more speculatively, he tracks songs back further, to the putative first Korean state led by Tan'gun. His three-fold division had become standard by 1960, when it was used in two volumes of lyrics, *Kujŏn minyojip*.<sup>82</sup> And, although *saenghwal set'ae* are sometimes divided into social *set'ae minyo* and entertainment *nori minyo*, the division still remains (e.g., Kang Yŏngae 2001, 65–67; Ri Tongwŏn 2002, vol. 2).<sup>83</sup>

It is, then, popular folk songs, formerly folk songs *for* the people, that are profiled in North Korean publications. The composer Ōm Hajin (1992), for example, labels each popular folk song simply as a "Korean folk song"

(*Chosŏn minyo*), except for a few he describes as "children's folk songs" (*adong minyo*). In contrast, Ch'oe Ch'angho distinguishes "old songs" (*yennora*; 1995, 19–70) from folk songs (*minyo*) spread through colonial-era recordings (7–9).<sup>84</sup> Ōm interprets history, at one point claiming, without evidence, that "*Nongbuga*" dates from the seventeenth century and that the current melody was in place by the eighteenth century. He also gives an alternative title for "*Nongbuga*": "*Sangsasori*/Song of Lovesickness" (1992, 29–30), which intimates a much more recent tale from Korea's southwest about how, at the most labor-intensive times in the rice growing cycle, girls would be working in the fields, skirts hitched up high, and unmarried men would travel from afar to look, searching for the prettiest brides.<sup>85</sup>

Again, popular folk songs are the "beautiful," "elegant," and "lyrical" songs explored by writers such as Nam Yŏngil (1991). Nam distinguishes local songs that had been transformed into popular folk songs in the early twentieth century (such as the southwestern women's song-and-dance "*Kanggangsullae*") from newly created folk songs (such as "*Nodŭl kangbyŏn*/Nodŭl Riverside"). In fact, the distinction is between popular folk songs created before the advent of the recording industry and *shin minyo* initially developed by known composers for record companies in the 1930s.<sup>86</sup> "*Kanggangsullae*" is given proletarian origins, having been developed to "cultivate the noble characters of unity and fellowship," but this plays down origins in ancient fertility rites and, although seemingly unrelated, in a sixteenth-century naval battle. In the legend of the battle, Korean admiral Ri Sunshin assembled women to dance on mountaintops on either side of the southwestern strait separating the southwestern Chindo island from the mainland to persuade the Japanese navy they were sailing into a trap, so that he could attack as the Japanese retreated. While the battle is mentioned as part of its history, the name ascribed to the song is actually a twentieth-century invention that added one syllable (*wŏl*, moon) to an older name ("*Kanggangsullae*") so that Sino-Korean characters could be called on that specifically signaled the battle (Nam 1991, 46; also, Ōm 1992, 6–8). Again, the ancient Shilla-era court dance "*Chŏryongmu*" is claimed, without evidence, as a local dance that was "modified by the aristocracy" (see also Kim and Sŏn 1986; Minsokhak yŏngushil 1988).<sup>87</sup>

Finally, to match ideology, and to feed on the official history and leadership cult, lyrics needed varying degrees of adjustment.<sup>88</sup> "*Toraji*/The Bellflower," originating in Hwanghae but popularized around Seoul by professional singers in the early twentieth century, had a text that needed only

minor changing to describe the socialist land of plenty promoted by Kim, as it became “*Hwanggŭmsan ŭi paek toraji*/The White Bellflower on Yellow Gold Mountain”:

In the depths of the mountain, white bellflowers grow,  
When one pulls up a few clumps, they fill my basket to overflowing . . .  
*Eheyŏ! Chihwaja!*  
There in the mountain, bellflowers bend with the wind.

In contrast, “*Ch’angbu t’aryŏng*” once described waiting for a long-lost lover to return, but needed new words and a new name, “*Moranbong*/Moran Hill”:

Is it called Moran Hill for its charming flowers?  
Around the hill, cuckoos sing and doves fly in the rebuilt city of  
Pyongyang.  
Our city endured enemy bombing during the Korean War:  
How great is socialist reconstruction!<sup>89</sup>

Here, the real subject is not the hill, for, in place of a girl waiting for her lover and a discussion of amorous love, a nation waits for its leader: Kim Il Sung gave his first speech on his return to Pyongyang in front of the hill, and later supervised the erection of the 50.2-meter-tall Ch’ŏllima monument on it, created by a collective of artists from the Mansudae Creative Company (Mansudae ch’angjaksŏ).<sup>90</sup>

Again, a former folk song for work, “*Mulleya*/Spinning Wheel,” was adjusted to juxtapose old and new lyrics:

You must know how I long for my lover:  
My heart is bound by threads of anxiety.  
When he comes home after driving back the enemy,  
Unbind them from my heart and turn around and around:  
Spinning wheel, my companion, turn around and around . . .

The Americans are our enemy:  
Let’s retaliate again and again,  
The bloodshed on the meandering Naktong river,  
We will repay for ever and ever:  
Spinning wheel, my companion, turn around and around.

And, as a final example, “*Kkungniri*/Song of Banging” was once characterized by the lexically meaningless repetition of “*nilliri*,” but now gained words relating directly to Kim and his childhood home:

*Kkungniri nilliri nirinaniri nilliri . . .*

10,000 villagers are happily gathered here:

This is the famous Mangyŏngdae, which was so nice to live in.

Oh, my baby dear, you were born in a beautiful part of the country,  
And will be a patriot to the nation, a blessing to the family, a good boy.

I won’t swap you even for lumps of silver or gold,  
You will be a hero to the nation, a blessing to the family, a treasure.

Anodyne old words were not forgotten, however, and in the new millennium VCDs and DVDs were produced that reverted to older versions of folk songs, designed for karaoke use by Korean communities at home and abroad.<sup>91</sup> Were producers aware that texts about Kim Il Sung and the socialist paradise were not acceptable abroad? I note that refugees from North Korea living today in South Korea and Europe judiciously cut political and ideological texts from their renditions of folk songs, but, as I will discuss in Chapter 9, songs and videos uploaded in recent years to the Korean Central News Agency website and to YouTube and Youku spare nothing as they celebrate the regime, its military, and its leaders. Conclusions, then, are premature.

## 2

# Instruments of the People

### *Kaeryang akki: “Improving” Korean instruments*

At the Fourth Congress of the Korean Workers’ Party in Pyongyang in September 1961, a five-year plan was announced to “improve” (K. *kaeryang*, C. *gailiang*) national instruments (*minjok akki*)<sup>1</sup>—Korean traditional instruments. As was the case with folk songs, and as explored in Chapter 1, national instruments were to be made suitable for the socialist state.<sup>2</sup> Six months earlier, in March 1961, an instruction from Kim Il Sung had recast the short-lived National Music Study Institute (Minjok ūmak yŏnguso) as the National Instrument Reforming Collective (Minjok akki kaeryang saŏpkwa), bringing together expertise from institutes and organizations such as the National Orchestra Association (Kungnibwŏn hyŏpchudan), the Dance Theater (Muyong kūkch’ang), and from musicians. Earlier still, in October 1960, the Central Committee of the Korean Workers’ Party had taken aim at *sadae chuŭi* (flunkeyism), that is, the negative imitation of the foreign. This had given impetus to paying attention to Korean traditional instruments (*kugakki*), to improve them as national instruments that would exceed the capabilities of Western instruments.

The five-year plan was the outcome of a decade of activity. In precolonial and colonial-era Korea, instruments had been made by artisans—just as many still are in South Korea—but in Pyongyang in 1951, during the Korean War, the Flower Instrument Manufacturing Company (Hwasŏn akki chejakso) was set up. Within a year of opening, this company employed 50 people who, it was claimed, could make all instrument types. This was renamed the Pyongyang Instrument Factory (P’yŏngyang akki kongjang) in October 1953 (Kim Kyŏngse 1967, 30–31; Ri Chongu 1995, 49–51; *Chosŏn yesul* 2004/6). Shifting to a production line necessitated new ways of working, severing close associations between makers and performers. Instruments needed to be standardized, because the factory crafted parts with machines, and workers were to be specialists in making and assembling components rather than crafting a complete instrument from start to finish. In addition to

the instrument factory, a National Instrument Construction Study Institute (Kungnip akki chejak yŏnguso) is mentioned in texts from 1953 onward, and in April 1960 this became part of the new National Music Study Institute.

To improve instruments required the assistance of traditional musicians, and it is pertinent to consider how many had settled in Pyongyang. Before and during the colonial period, professional musicians had congregated in the cosmopolitan heart of the country, Seoul, which became the center for radio broadcasting and the rapidly developing concert culture. Meanwhile, many specialist performers of folk and folk art genres—such as the genre of *sanjo* (scattered melodies) for melodic instrument and drum, and *p’ansori* (epic storytelling through song)—hailed from the southwestern Chŏlla provinces. Pyongyang was known historically for its courtesans, but instrumental expertise was thin on the ground, as indicated in a later reflection by An Jong U at the Sixth Asian Music Symposium, held in Pyongyang in October 1983:

Since our country was a feudal society . . . under the colonial rule of the Japanese imperialists, our national instruments failed to attain development . . . and were almost on the verge of disappearance and ruin. . . . We suffered from a dearth of our own musicians and weak material foundation.

Some traditional musicians moved northward from what became South Korea to Pyongyang after liberation from the Japanese yoke in 1945 and during the years leading up to the Korean War. One who “felt for the suffering of countrymen” in Seoul and “followed his heart” and moved to Pyongyang in June 1946 was the *sanjo* specialist An Kiok (1894–1974; as related in Chang Yŏngchŏl 1998, 279–88). He is important to my account because he moved to China, to Yanbian (K. Yŏnbyŏn) in Jilin Province, during the Korean War, where there was a paucity of traditional instrumentalists among the Chinese Korean population (the *Chaoxianzu*; Koo 2007, 66–94). But there, beginning in 1952, and as part of the response to a directive issued after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, An helped develop the *kayagŭm* half-tube zither. The Yanbian-based musicologist Kim Tŭkkyun recalled at a conference of the National Traditional Arts Study Association (K. Minjok chŏnt’ong yesul haksulhoe) I attended on July 13, 1999, that Shin Hanim, a Korean who had studied in the Soviet Union, worked closely with An.<sup>3</sup> An returned to Pyongyang after the war, and in 1956 he was appointed a people’s artist (he had been a merit artist since 1952) and became chair of the National Music Investigation Committee (Kukche minjok ūmak

simsawiwŏn).<sup>4</sup> Beyond An's role in improving national instruments, a point to note is that as new ideology bedded in, traditional music was not banned, although debates took place as to what should be retained or transformed.<sup>5</sup>

### **Soviet and/or Chinese influence?**

North Korea was able to learn from China and also from the Soviet Union, since both had already worked to improve national instruments. However, as noted in Chapter 1 with respect to songs, care must be taken in reading reforms in North Korea, and, in respect to instruments, the evidence suggests Pyongyang's planners navigated a path between Chinese, Soviet, and more local ideas. Also, materials available at hand were utilized, since improved national instruments clearly took elements from Western instruments.

Following the purges that had marked the first Chŏllima years, by the time of the Fourth Congress in 1961, few Soviet-leaning Koreans remained in the Central Committee, and few of the Chinese faction who had been with Mao in Yan'an still had their posts; those who remained had long since proven their loyalty to Kim Il Sung (Buzo 1999, 64–65; Armstrong 2013, 130). During the summer before the Congress, though, Kim Il Sung signed treaties of friendship with both the Soviet Union and China. He traveled from Moscow to Beijing, and it is reported that he failed to tell Moscow of his intentions in Beijing, reflecting what Charles Armstrong refers to as his “masterful manipulation” of the two patrons (2013, 124, citing Cheng Xiaohe 2010, 183 and Shimotomai 2011, 135). Adding a second piece to the jigsaw, Kim Ch'angman, the Chinese-leaning “ideological sidekick” (Cumings 1990, 310) and former speech writer to Kim Il Sung, who had spent some years in the background, returned to the front line when he was appointed vice chair of the Central Party School as the Congress was held (Myers 1994, 143, citing Yi Hanggu 1974, 244).<sup>6</sup> The southern faction had not escaped criticism. In 1958 An Mak was ousted as deputy minister of culture, for his “bourgeois tendencies,” by spring 1959, denounced by the literature strongman behind the southern faction, Han Sŏrya, An was under house arrest. He had attempted to bolster cultural links with the Soviet world but failed as cultural production became more isolationist within what Armstrong calls “revolutionary nationalism” (2003b, 183)—the confluence of the Chŏllima campaign and the ideology of *juche*. An's wife, the dancer Chŏe Sŭnghŭi, lost her place on state bodies. However, in 1961, although only briefly, she



again became influential when she was appointed chair of the Korean Dance Union (Chosŏn muyong tongmaeng), a subsidiary body of the Federation of Korean Literature and Art Unions, which, in turn, served as the umbrella organization for artists and writers (O Yongu 2013, 205).<sup>7</sup>

Even if Soviet influence had waned, the decade of its influence prior to Chŏllima surely impacted the development of instruments. In pre-revolutionary Russia, reforming local—national—instruments had already been necessary with the development of the Russian orchestra, which had been established in the 1890s by Vasily Andreyev (1861–1918),<sup>8</sup> and for the State Russian Folk Orchestra, founded in 1919 and commonly associated with its leader from 1940, Nikolai Osipov. One characteristic of Andreyev’s Russian orchestra was that instruments formerly associated with solo or small ensemble repertoires were enlisted as parts of larger groups, an approach that chimes with Lenin’s idea of the collective. In the late 1920s, Moscow encouraged Soviet republics to set up orchestras on the Russian model but using local instruments, despite dogma that advocated the unity of the international proletariat. So even as the locality of preexisting or possible nation-states was removed, local instruments were developed to serve the model, performing music that looked to the harmonic and melodic structures favored by nineteenth-century Russian Romantic composers.<sup>9</sup> Orchestras based on the model premiered in Azerbaijan in 1931, in Kazakhstan in 1934, in Uzbekistan in 1937, and in Kyrgyzstan in 1938.<sup>10</sup> Stalin soon placed restrictions on what was permitted, but the early 1950s saw—as Soviet cultural advice flowed into Pyongyang—further efforts to revitalize regional culture,<sup>11</sup> as new orchestras of improved instruments were set up in Siberian republics such as Buryatia and Yakutia.<sup>12</sup>

Comparable orchestras had also been trialed in China.<sup>13</sup> Efforts had begun during the Nationalist period, particularly with Liu Tianhua’s Society for Reforming National Instruments (Guoyue gaijinshe) in the 1920s, and with Zheng Jinwen’s (1872–1935) interpretation of *guoyue* in Shanghai.<sup>14</sup> As composers and musicians sought to replace feudalism with modernity, such efforts absorbed an idealized understanding of Western instruments. They argued for creating a reformed national music, typically adopting Western structures and forms, and in which the techniques used for Western instruments would be applied to Chinese equivalents. As with the Russian orchestra, they explored how instruments could blend within ensembles and orchestras (Han Kuo-Huang 1979; Gong 2008, 54–56). One orchestra of Chinese instruments was established in Nanjing in 1935, linked to a radio

station (the Zhongyang guangbo diantai yinyue zuguo yuedui; Jeffcoat 2010). Given, though, that a typical refrain against reform is the loss of identity, and that artists (including composers who master Western music techniques and see these as more “modern” than traditional music) decry the backwardness of locality, the 1930s saw a balance sought as the Nationalist “New Life Movement” argued the need to maintain elements of Chinese tradition (Eastman 1990, 66–69).

Rightists and leftists often share a discourse on art, and much of the Nationalist agenda was absorbed and recast by Mao Zedong. In his 1942 talks at the Yan’an forum, he struggled to elevate the culture of the masses into art for the present:

Books and other works from the past<sup>15</sup> . . . are things that the ancients and foreigners processed and fabricated from the literature and art they perceived in popular life in their own time and place. We must absorb these things in a discriminating way . . . it makes a difference to have this model, the difference between being civilized or vulgar, crude or refined, advanced or elementary, fast or slow; therefore, we certainly may not reject the ancients and foreigners as models, which means, I’m afraid, that we must even use feudal and bourgeois things. But they are only models and not substitutes; they can’t be substitutes. Indiscriminate plagiarism, imitation, or substitution in literature and art of dead people or foreigners is an extremely sterile and harmful literary and artistic dogmatism. (trans. McDougall 1980, 69)

To this, I should add what from 1956 became a much-repeated slogan: “Make the past serve the present, and foreign culture serve China” (*Guwei jinyong, yangwei Zhongyong*). Or, in Mao’s words, from his 1956 “Talk to Music Writers”:

We must learn from foreign countries and absorb all their fine things. But what we learn from foreign countries must be used for the purpose of studying and developing the art of the various nationalities in China. . . . In learning from the arts of foreign countries and studying their fundamental theory and technique, our objective is to create for the various nationalities of China their own new socialist art that bears their particular national form and style. . . . We must thoroughly study both the good things in China and the good things from foreign countries, and must combine the

two sides into an organic whole. . . . When two sides are combined, the form will change. It is impossible for them to remain completely unchanged. . . . We must pay attention to absorbing foreign things in a critical manner. . . . We can make use of foreign musical instruments, but must not copy foreign music in our musical composition. (trans. Leung and Kay 1992, 96–100)

Influence from China also occurred in North Korea because of the strong links between musicians and scholars in Pyongyang and the Korean Autonomous Region in China. Indeed, at the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, and as instruments were being improved in Pyongyang, a number of Chinese Korean musicians fled to Pyongyang (Pease 2016, 170).

### North Korean particularity

In North Korea, the resonances with Liu and Zheng’s efforts are intriguing: standardizing instrument sizes and tunings; modifying instrument structures (including, in particular, replacing the single tube of the Chinese bamboo *dizi* flute and Korean *tanso* and *chōdae* flutes with a two-piece tube, the pieces being connected by a copper joint that allows for tuning adjustment when played in ensembles); introducing larger versions of the Chinese *erhu* and Korean *haegŭm* fiddles to create an orchestral string section; and reintroducing a long-defunct harp (C. *gonghou*, K. *konghu*).<sup>16</sup> All of these were part of what was put in train by North Korea’s five-year plan in 1961. As a result, much of the territory later set out by Kim Jong Il in his *On the Art of Music/Ŭmak yesullon* (1991, 441–48, 1992, 83–90) will be familiar to those knowledgeable about Chinese instrument developments. Here, I will cite Kim’s treatise at length, using the English version but incorporating elements from the Korean original as needed; note that the treatise is assembled from multiple earlier texts, rather than being a unified account:

The beauty of music is derived [from beautiful melodies] but also from the harmony of tone colors. Music sounds truly beautiful when the resonance of the sounds of different instruments with their unique tone colors are properly harmonized. The task of instrumentation is to select instruments with the required tone colors . . . [to] obtain new timbres by combining different tone colors in various ways, and harmonize them.

[Today's Korean music is] ensemble music. Almost no specialized musical piece performed on our contemporary stage is purely melodic. Although melodies are the most important means of expression, they alone cannot sustain artistic qualities . . . unless they draw on a variety of forms of instrumental ensembles.

Combining national instruments and Western instruments is essential for enhancing the role of our national instruments, modernizing national music and subordinating Western instruments to the development of our national music. Our national instruments have tone colors agreeable to the tastes and emotions of Koreans. . . . However, we have inherited musical instruments of the feudal age that [have] failed to benefit from modern technological advances because of the Japanese imperialists' policy of obliterating our national culture. These instruments have quite a few limitations. . . . We must, therefore, improve the instruments from the old society in keeping with modern aesthetic tastes, and develop their orchestral organization in a new way by combining them with Western instruments.

Western instruments . . . with the help of the industrial revolution and technological progress, developed into modern instruments on a scientific basis, became spread beyond geographical boundaries, and were accepted as instruments to be used worldwide. Western instruments found their way into our country at an early date; in this the Soviet Union and Japan acted as intermediaries. . . . We must subordinate [Western instruments] to the development of our national music. . . . They must be made to perform our music and produce timbres in our own style through their combination with national instruments, so as to sustain the excellence of our instruments.<sup>17</sup>

[We must make] national instruments the principal component of the combination, giving prominence to their excellence . . . [but] in order to effect this combination, national instruments have to reach the level of Western instruments or be developed and perfected at a higher level than that of Western instruments. Modernizing national instruments is an important precondition for realizing their combined organization.

In improving national instruments, we have preserved their peculiar timbres, made the necessary alterations in their shapes and materials, and adopted new ones when necessary, in keeping with the requirements of modern science and technology. In this way, we have made their timbres clearer and increased the volume of their sounds . . . while guarding strictly

against the wrong tendency of converting *kayagŭm* [zithers] into guitars and preserving the capability to [apply tremolo] and other unique features.

Of our national instruments, bamboo wind instruments like *tanſo* [vertical flute] and *chŏdae* [transverse flute] are unique and splendid instruments which produce clear and plaintive sounds that no other instruments can imitate. We can be proud of national string instruments like *kayagŭm*, *yanggŭm* [dulcimer], and *ongnyugŭm* [harp zither] for their unique methods of [plucking and striking with fingers or sticks]. The *haegŭm* [fiddle] and its [various versions] produce very restrained sounds which are agreeable to our people's feelings.

[The various versions of] *haegŭm* and the [different instruments in the] violin [family] should be combined at the ratio of 1:1 to produce a third sound.<sup>18</sup> The string instruments [when] combined on this principle produce very beautiful and elegant sounds which are neither the sounds of *haegŭm* nor the violin. These are unique sounds that no other instruments in the world can produce.

One difference from Russian and Soviet-style national orchestras was present from the beginning: improved instruments were to sit alongside Western instruments, working together rather than being kept separate. One important similarity was that national instruments were to be used in ensembles or orchestras, rather than functioning primarily as solo instruments. But for this to be the case, a balancing act was required in Korea, and this is made clear in a comment by Kim Il Sung:

It would be possible to reform national instruments so that they become like Western instruments. But, although this would be possible, it is not to be done. The shapes and identities of national instruments are different to Western instruments, and if we only retained the names we would have lost our instruments. Koreans like our national instruments and regard their distinctive sounds as special. If we make our instruments sound bright like Western instruments, they will have lost their distinctiveness. (Kim Il Sung, *Sahoe chu'ui munhak yesullŏn* 537–38, cited in Han Namyŏng 1983, 10)

Instruments were to reflect both the contemporary reality and project forward to a future in which Korean and Western soundworlds would fuse together to create something new—a third sound. But prominence was to be given to national instruments over Western equivalents. Hence, later

guides to orchestration such as Pak Chŏngnam's *Paehap kwanhyŏnak p'yŏnsŏngbŏp* (1990)<sup>19</sup> consider national instruments before their Western counterparts, whether discussing instrument construction, playing techniques, or methods for orchestration and arrangement. Improving national instruments was argued to assist with creating national music (Yun Yŏnghwan 1961, 24), and match the tastes of modern citizens (Ri Hirim 1979, 199). The logic essentially came, via Mao, from Stalin: "The development of cultures national in form and socialist in content is necessary."<sup>20</sup> Mao's struggle to elevate the local in his talks and slogans was no different from what North Korea felt it needed to do, because foreign (Western) instruments had come to dominate the local music scene. That dominance could, though, be accommodated by Stalin's statement, which, as he championed global socialism, continued, ". . . for the purpose of their ultimate fusion into one General Culture, socialist as to form and content, and expressed in one general language."

Pyongyang's five-year plan envisaged training instrumentalists, composers, and educators. It would equip instrument manufacturers, and it would encourage theaters and other performance spaces to introduce improved instruments into their resident ensembles. While the reforms were cast as a requirement of the ideology of *juche* that emerged from Kim Il Sung's 1955 speech, the distinctiveness of instruments was discussed in terms of tuning, voice, color, and timbre (*ŭmgye*, *ŭmyŏk*, *ŭmnyang*, *ŭmsaek*) (Nam Yŏngil 1991, 22–36). For improved national instruments to match Western equivalents, ranges were to be increased, volumes regularized, and new techniques introduced. So, for example, much as the *haegŭm* fiddle should be able to play nineteenth-century violin studies, a *kayagŭm* zither should be able to match the piano, playing triadic harmony as well as melodic lines (Nam 1991, 161–62; see also Kim Chiyŏn 2001, 257–58). Traditional rhythmic cycles, *changdan*, were to be retained, but the narrow pentatonism of old was to be replaced by the ability to play Western diatonic scales, so instruments were to have the ability to play all 12 chromatic semitones. At the same time, instrument timbres and techniques needed development to match the now standard light and lyrical *juche* voice. As I showed with folk songs in Chapter 1, this had implications for ornamentation that, although being a core feature of individual instruments evincing timbre and tuning (or, to use a term favored by South Korean musicologists, "microtonal shading"), was distinct to specific instruments. Ornamentation created dissonant heterophony when instruments were combined in ensembles, but,



**Figure 2.1** Studying *ŏun'gŭm* lutes at the reformed instrument exhibition, 2017. Photo by Xosé Crisanto Gándara, used with permission.

equally, it clashed with lyrical vocal melodies, and Kim Il Sung demanded that all melodies should be lyrical.

Exhibitions of improved instruments were held that showcased progress, the first at the Fourth Congress in 1961. In 1963 more than 150 instruments were displayed (Yu Youngmin 2007, 64); in 1983, according to An Jong U's paper at the Sixth Asian Music Symposium, more than 130 were shown. Exhibitions have continued to the present day (Figure 2.1).

To this point, I have rendered the chosen term for the process, *kaeryang*, as “improved” and, by extension, “improvement,” because, as a term shared by Chinese nationalist thinking and by the Soviets, this is the common translation. But it is a contentious term when seen from outside the socialist world, so from here on I substitute “reformed.”<sup>21</sup>

The principles I have outlined remained operational when, in June and July 1992, I interviewed the musicologist Ri Ch'anggu and the then director of the Isang Yun Music Research Institute, Chŏng Pongsŏk:

HOWARD: When students learn theory, do they study national music as well as Western music?



RI: Yes, they study both. . . . If you only study national music, you only read old literature such as *Akhak kwebŏm* [Guide to the Study of Music, 1493].<sup>22</sup> Without studying Western music as well, you cannot really say that you study Korean music. Do you know the Korean proverb, “*umuran kaegŏri*” (a frog in a small pond)? The frog thinks that what it sees in the small pond is all there is. If you only study national music, then you are like that frog.

HOWARD: Why should someone who performs reformed instruments also study Western music? Isn’t the way that the instruments are played very different?

RI: Students take points of reference from Western instruments in order to develop their playing techniques for our reformed instruments. They may study the violin or cello, but cannot become a professional violinist or cellist, because they need to concentrate efforts on the reformed instrument. But they need to study Hoffman’s and Kreisler’s “*Études*” in order to play the *haegŭm* (fiddle) well. Composition is the same. Until the 1960s, there was a division made between Korean and Western composition in the Pyongyang Music College. But if we compose our music without knowing Western techniques of development, we cannot compose fully. Should we really only play old music like *sanjo*? Our traditional music is monophonic (*tansŏng*) whereas Western music is polyphonic (*tasŏng*). We should not just compose using monophony, but need to develop our music by using polyphony. This allows us to develop music in many different ways. So in the 1960s we combined the two departments, and composition students ever since have learned Korean music as well as Western music. Some mainly study national music, while others concentrate on studying Western sonata form, variation form, and so on. Students who study Western composition techniques must also learn folk songs, the hourglass drum (*changgo*) and rhythmic cycles (*changdan*). . . . These are compulsory parts of their training, since if a composer doesn’t know about rhythmic cycles, then they are not a Korean composer.

CHŎNG: Broadly speaking, what we do is 100 percent national music (*minjok ŭmak*). In its narrow meaning, national music is traditional music . . .

RI (in the background): *Chŏnt’ong* (traditional) *minjok ŭmak*.

CHŎNG: . . . *Chŏnt’ong minjok ŭmak* is very precious, and we are actively developing it. It has a long history, because our people are creative and talented. As we develop it, we should accept where it came from. But we should not simply imitate the past. That would constitute revivalism, when art should reflect the current times, and art has a duty to lead people into the future. If art asks people to go backwards, then



that is not right. There is no meaning anymore if an old instrument makes the [creaky] sound “*aeng, aeng, aeng*” [onomatopoeia for bowed *ajaeng* zither and *haegŭm* fiddle sounds]. Art has an essential duty to adapt to the emotions of the modern age. Thus, it must continuously develop. . . . The *kayagŭm* zither in the past had 12 strings, and sounded “*tong, tong, tong*.” This is very old-fashioned. It used only the pentatonic scale. Today, our reformed *kayagŭm* not only can produce this old sound but is able to play all 12 [Western major and minor] chromatic pitches. In the old days, the left hand rested on the moveable bridges (*kwa*) while the right hand plucked. Today, expanded to 21 strings, the performer doesn’t rest the left hand in this way, but now all left and right-hand fingers can pluck the strings, creating both melodies and harmonies.

RI (in the background): We still use vibrato (*nonghyŏn*).

CHŎNG: Yes, we still use vibrato, like in the past, but today’s *kayagŭm* can also play melodies together with harmonies.

HOWARD: Why do today’s musicians use yesterday’s vibrato techniques?

CHŎNG: Being able to play old styles of music is part of the fundamental theory involved in our reformed instruments. It is a paramount requirement that we retain the original shape: it should have the shape of a *kayagŭm*, not take on the shape of a guitar. The shape and structure enable the *kayagŭm* to retain its color and timbre. If we consider the *tanso* (vertical flute), it used to have holes awkwardly spaced far apart, but now it has keywork added so that it can play chromatic pitches easily. It can, therefore, play any Western music. Again, the *chŏdae* (transverse flute), *p’iri* (oboe) and *haegŭm* have all been modernized, but they keep the old structures and learn from the structures of Western instruments. Still, the small *so haegŭm* has adopted some characteristics from the violin, and the mid-sized *chung haegŭm* has adopted some characteristics from the viola. By consistently doing this, we have been able to create a new orchestra.

HOWARD: Do the timbres of Western instruments and Korean instruments differ?

CHŎNG: Yes. And when the violin and *haegŭm* are played together, they make the sound “*pa*,” which is a unique sound, the third sound.

HOWARD: Do you mean that a very different sound occurs when the reformed instrument and the violin are played?

CHÖNG: It is still the sound of the *haegŭm*. But in the old days, it had a much rougher sound—a huskier voice—than it has today. So only part of the old sound remains in the reformed *haegŭm*. What I was referring to is that when the violin and *haegŭm* play together, you don't hear the sound of one or the other instrument, but a new, third sound. And this new sound is very pleasing.

### The *chang saenap*

One of the first projects of the National Music Study Institute was to reform the shawm as the *chang saenap*. The reformed instrument was displayed as part of the exhibition at the Fourth Congress, and it was singled out for presentation before Kim Il Sung, playing a new piece, “*Kyöngch'uk*/Celebration.” What previously had been a ribald, screaming, outdoor instrument favored by the rural percussion band genre (*nongak*<sup>23</sup>) and for royal, state, and ritual processional music (*ch'wit'a*), now, superficially at least, matched the look and sound of the Western oboe.

In its traditional form, the shawm was known in North Korea as the *saenap* (the Sino-Korean characters are more correctly rendered “*soaenap*”). In South Korea, it is commonly referred to as the *t'aep'yöngso* in relation to court music, or as the *hojök*, using Sino-Korean characters that signify origin, or in much of the countryside, using onomatopoeia, as the *nallari*. The shawm's identification with the folk reflects its use in percussion bands, where its player once extemporized at the edge of a paddy field or a village meeting place. In this capacity, the old instrument continues to be played in North Korea,<sup>24</sup> much as it does in South Korea, as well as in recent developments such as with the *samulnori* quartet.<sup>25</sup> It is also found among Chinese Koreans in Jilin, where *nongak* was inscribed by UNESCO as part of Chinese cultural heritage in 2008. In so doing, the Chinese wrong-footed the Koreans, and South Korea only succeeded in adding *nongak*, as a Korean (rather than Chinese) genre, to the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in November 2014. In Pyongyang, percussion band extemporizations have been transcribed for students learning the *chang saenap* in standard workbooks, in *kutköri* (6/8 + 6/8), *chajinmori* (fast 12/8) and *hwimori* (4/4) rhythmic cycles (Chu Kün-yong and Ri Myöngchöl 1985, 108–110; Chu Kün-yong 1991, 90–92), while a resurgence of accounts

about *nongak* occurred in the run up to the 2014 UNESCO listing (e.g., Kim Sŏnyŏng 2013).

In 2000 the senior player and pedagogue Chu Kŭnyong told me that the shawm had been played at the court since 1394, the third year of T’aejo’s reign at the beginning of the Chosŏn dynasty and the year when the court moved south from Kaesŏng in today’s North Korea to Hanyang (today’s Seoul). Its use that year, Chu told me, was recorded in the 1493 treatise *Akhak kwebŏm*. The instrument, he said, was played by court musicians when the king paraded or welcomed foreign diplomats, and from Sŏngjin’s reign (r. 1494–1506) onward it was used within the ensemble for the Rite to Royal Ancestors (*Chongmyo cheryeak*). The shawm actually features in three sections of one of the two suites constituting the music for the rite, *Chŏngdaeyŏp*, playing music created during Sejong’s reign (r. 1418–1450), and it is this that is recorded in *Akhak kwebŏm* (see Yi 1979, vol. 2, 121–22)—that is, after 1394 but before Sŏngjin’s reign.

The shawm probably arrived in Korea from northwest Asia several centuries earlier, during the Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392; see Chang Sahun 1976, 117), and one of its names, *hojŏk* (C. *hoejok*), points to origins in the border region between China and Central Asia (Yang Yinliu 1981, 853). Indeed, similar instruments populate the Islamic world, and the common Chinese name, *suona* (metal blowing instrument, K. *soaenap*), is cognate to *zurna*, a common name for it further West. Indeed, as a processional instrument beyond China, it provided the melodic component of the janissary bands that accompanied the Ottoman march on Vienna in 1683, leaving a memory in the battery of percussion used in orchestras and added to late eighteenth-century pianos. Equally, it can be seen in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century iconography of Korean envoy processions to Japan<sup>26</sup> and is central to *Taech’wit’a*, the royal processional music preserved in South Korea as National Intangible Cultural Property 46. Other processional band instruments were percussive—including straight trumpets—and so could readily be played by military conscripts, but historians assume that expert shawm players would be recruited from local percussion bands when needed by the court or the military.

Reformed, the shawm became the *chang saenap* (Figure 2.2). In April 2000, Chu told me why it was deemed to require development:

The old style of instrument was not perfect. It had a loud and piercing sound, and it had limitations. As the sound was so loud, it could not be used



Figure 2.2 *Chang saenap* (shawm). Photo by Keith Howard.

in an ensemble with other melodic instruments. And, because it only had small holes tuned to a pentatonic scale, it was hard for it to play complex melodic lines. Therefore, it could not play much national music.

To fit the reform agenda, the *chang saenap* first required a softening and rounding of its sound (Chu 1986, 8–9). Second, it needed to gain a chromatic range. Chu emphasized that although many specialists worked on its development, musicians took key roles, and this ensured that the old voice and timbre were retained. Although this understanding is repeatedly encountered, it underplays the use of Western instruments as models, since the *chang saenap* is today not unlike a Western wind instrument, with a double reed resembling that of an oboe and keywork close to the single-reed clarinet.<sup>27</sup> Its reed (*ridŭ*) was lengthened and narrowed, with a band pinching it at midpoint (like the oboe). The body (*kwandae*), attached to the reed by a metal post or neck (*chorongmok*), was lengthened and the conical bore reduced, so that the instrument would overblow at the octave (the outside

of the body remains, however, slightly conical) rather than at the twelfth, as the traditional shawm (and clarinet) did.<sup>28</sup> The bell (*nap'al*) was reduced in size, although, unlike Western oboes or clarinets, a separate metal bell was retained. The positions of open holes were adjusted to given an equal-tempered diatonic scale. Keywork was added, taking much from the Boehm system of the clarinet, including characteristic key rings, key extensions, rods, and rod fixings. The two are not identical: the *chang saenap* has five key extensions operated by the fourth and fifth fingers of the right hand to sound low pitches, whereas modern English and French clarinets have four;<sup>29</sup> the *chang saenap* has four adjustment keys for the fifth finger of the left hand, where the clarinet has three; and so on. Creating a chromatic instrument required a complex arrangement of keys, resulting in some difficult fingering combinations.

It was the first iteration of the *chang saenap* that was presented at the Fourth Congress. This had a range of just over two octaves, from d' to e''' (as a transposing instrument in B $\flat$ , sounding c' to d'''), roughly a third more than the old instrument, but less than a Western oboe. In 1962, to celebrate the anniversary of the initiation of the instrument development project, the *chang saenap* played as soloist in a dance piece, “*Muyongsu ūi chàmndwin ttal*/The Dancer’s Faithful Daughter,” and by 1963 its range had been expanded down to c#’ and, through a mix of embouchure and keys, upwards to g#''' (neither workbook, though, indicates anything higher than e'''). In 1964, the addition of an adjustment hole<sup>30</sup> halfway up the body, linked to one of the keys for the left fifth finger, allowed low c' to be reached. Further minor adjustments were made until around 1970. Table 2.1 gives the typical fingering chart, the holes numbered from the lower end of the instrument upwards to the top; open holes in the lower octave are shaded, numbered 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, and 15.

Teaching was standardized. Students today first learn the standing posture and angle at which the instrument should be held (Chu 1985, 16–24) before mastering the middle register, initially practicing fingering without blowing, then building descending scales. This more or less matches Western wind instrument pedagogy. Breath control is vital, and students are taught circular breathing. As with the traditional Korean *p'iri* oboe, embouchure adjustments are needed for high pitches, for sliding tones (*kkŭlsori*), and for vibrato (*nongŭm*). Chu showed me how staccato (*kkŭn'gi*) and grace notes (*kyŏp'ò ssŭgi*) required tonguing. Trills (*kullim sori*) that rapidly alternate adjacent pitches are, because of the complex arrangement of open holes and



extension keys, far from straightforward, hence the technical workbook takes three pages to detail them (Chu 1985, 96–98). Exercises are used to build fluency, starting with scalar passages, moving through staccato and staccato/legato combinations, then introducing ever-larger leaps. Trills and vibrato techniques are mastered by practicing folk song melodies; vibrato involves moving the head up and down against the reed, and Chu told me this was best mastered from slow to fast in order for the novice to avoid tensing the lips against the reed. Ideology requires *chang saenap* workbooks to include popular folk song arrangements, but this essentially continues the tradition in which the *saenap* provided melodic interest in percussion bands. “*Yöngnam kinari*” is perhaps the most complex, switching between *kutköri* (6/8 + 6/8) and *tanmori* (4/4) rhythmic cycles, but “*Hüng t’aryöng*,” “*Nodül kangbyön*,” “*Panga t’aryöng*,” “*Nongbuga*,” and a number of “*Arirang*” variants that include a “*Kyöngsangdo arirang*” based around the *önmori* (5/8) rhythmic cycle<sup>31</sup> are also included in workbooks. Songs, including, of course, “Song of General Kim Il Sung,” have also been arranged.

Since the *chang saenap* is factory made, each aspect of construction is prescribed. The length of the body is 500 mm, almost twice the length of most old *saenap*,<sup>32</sup> and distances from the center of each hole to the base of the bell<sup>33</sup> are prescribed as 402 mm, 388 mm, 382 mm, 378 mm, 365 mm, 350 mm, 340 mm, 336 mm, 319 mm, 310 mm, 297 mm, 286 mm, 273.5 mm, 260 mm, 243.5 mm, 241 mm, 220.5 mm, 189 mm, 153 mm, 143 mm, 121 mm, 85 mm, and 52 mm. The hole sizes vary according to function, with the diameter of those towards the lower end of the tube being as large as 1 cm but small tuning adjustment holes reducing to as small as 1.5 mm. Despite this apparent precision, I ordered an instrument in 2000 that was unplayable when it arrived. Commenting that factory workers are not musicians, Chu took it from me, worked on it over a weekend, and returned it duly fixed.

### Winds of change

Ri Hirim (1979, 379–83) remarks that two other instruments, the *rabal* (a straight trumpet) and *ragak* (a conch shell used in court and ceremonial processions), the latter on occasions reusing older names such as *sora*, *chungna*, and *taera*, briefly emerged in reformed versions. The 1963 exhibition displayed four sizes of *ragak*, from small to large (*so ragak*, *chung ragak*, *tae ragak*, *chö ragak*), metal piping replacing the precious shell, and larger versions coiling

pipework around a bell to create what looks like a cross between a Baroque serpent and a French horn. By the time of an exhibition celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the founding of the state in 1968, only two, the *tae ragak* and *chŏ ragak*, were displayed.<sup>34</sup> Journals are silent about both instruments after then, when, as Kim Jong Il later confirmed in his *On the Art of Music*, it was decided there was “no need to make national brass instruments by imitating Western ones. The latter can be used as they are” (1991, 446). By 1969, as revealed in the score collection *Ch’wijuak kokchip* (Collection of Pieces for Blowing Instruments),<sup>35</sup> songs were being arranged for wind bands of Western instruments, with flutes, clarinets, saxophones, trumpets, trombones, and tubas. The operas of the 1970s likewise feature Western brass.

The traditional oboe, the *p’iri*, narrowly avoided the same fate. Three distinct types are known in traditional music: the thick and squat *tang p’iri*, which plays music originating in China; the thin *se p’iri*, used primarily for accompanying voices; and the ubiquitous *hyang p’iri* (indigenous oboe).<sup>36</sup> It is the latter that concerns me here. It has a slightly rough and piercing sound, generated because of its oversized bamboo reed, and this led North Korean committees to consider it to have an inappropriate timbre, akin to the Chinese conception of being noisy (*guanzi*), although the term used in one publication by Kim Chiyŏn (2001) is the partially onomatopoeic *ssweksori*. The concern was that its timbre was insufficiently lyrical, leaving it struggling to match Western instruments in an ensemble. Such an understanding, however, seemingly ignores the role the *p’iri* had long taken in traditional ensembles, such as those for the literati genre of *p’ungnyu* (and in the suite that derives from this, *Yŏngsan hoesang*), where it knitted wind and string groups together. The probable reason for its use being questioned is that the *chang saenap* had usurped its place before attempts could be made to reform it. Nonetheless, efforts to modify it were subsequently made, initially generating the “small” *so p’iri*.<sup>37</sup> This version retained the oversize reed from the old instrument (known in northern texts not as the *hyang p’iri*, but as the *chaeraeshik p’iri*, “former oboe”), but replaced the bamboo body with a cylindrical tube of birch or rosewood. Old instruments had a narrow range that reflected the difficulty of overblowing an upper octave; the reformed instrument used overblowing and an abundance of keywork to give a broader chromatic range of two octaves and a tone (c’–d’’’). However, the 1986 technical workbook by Kim Ch’angjin, where the *so p’iri* occupies just four out of a total of 206 pages, indicates that this reformed instrument soon moved into the background.



Two larger *p'iri* versions were developed, the *tae p'iri* and *chŏ p'iri*. These proved more useful than the *so p'iri*, particularly in revolutionary opera orchestras, and they still take minor roles in large ensembles, playing as the equivalents to Western cor anglais and bassoon. Note, though, that the journal *Chosŏn yesul* makes no mention of them across a 30-year period, from June 1983 until September 2013. The *tae p'iri* was first described in *Chosŏn yesul* in December 1968. It then had a body resembling the Western oboe rather than the cor anglais, the tube of the old instrument lengthened to a cylindrical body of hardwood and adding a small conical base (the cor anglais has a curved body and a bulb beyond the finger holes). The range was d–b<sup>'''</sup>, although the instrument could technically produce two additional higher semitones, b<sup>'''</sup> and c<sup>'''</sup>. The feel would be familiar to any oboe or cor anglais player, with a similar right-hand thumb support and keywork reminiscent of the Western instruments, except that, as with the *chang saenap*, the right fourth and fifth fingers operated five key extensions to give lower pitches. The open holes produced a diatonic scale, giving, from the top open hole downwards, a descending e'–d'–c'–b'–a'–g–f. The *chŏ p'iri* came later, first being described in *Chosŏn yesul* in April 1970. It had a separate metal neck much like a bassoon, and by doubling the tube back on itself within a shorter absolute length an extra octave was added, giving a range of B<sup>b</sup>–b<sup>''</sup>. A spike attached to a knee rest supported the instrument. As with the *chang saenap*, both *tae p'iri* and *chŏ p'iri* were transposing instruments in B<sup>b</sup> (and so were notated one tone higher than sounded). The technical workbook offers precise measurements for both, but not for the *so p'iri*: the *tae p'iri* has a bell, two body sections with holes (the top section with an integrated upper chamber) and a reed. Holes are drilled with centers at 5.5 mm, 21.5 mm, 36.5 mm, 38 mm, 41 mm, 53.5 mm, 67 mm, 70.5 mm, 85.5 mm, 102.5 mm, 111 mm, 124 mm, and 178.5 mm above the middle joint (between the two body sections), and at 20 mm, 64 mm, 105.5 mm, 139.5 mm, 171 mm, 195 mm, 220.5 mm, 242.5 mm, 265 mm, 266 mm, and 284.5 mm above the bottom joint (between the bell and the lower body section); the hole diameters range from 3.5 mm to 9 mm. The repertoire offered in the workbook consists largely of exercises, although some folk music is arranged using the *anttang* (4/4), *semach'i* (as *yangsando*, 9/8<sup>38</sup>), *chungmori* (here, as 12/8), *t'aryŏng*, *chajinmori*, and *tŏngdŏkkung* (all 12/8), *kutkŏri* (6/8+6/8), and *ŏnmori* (5/8) rhythmic cycles. A few song arrangements are also given.

Establishing a trio of oboes, the *p'iri sogakki* (*sok/sog-* = family; *akki* = instruments), was part of a wider policy. A trio of *saenap* was also

created, adding *tae saenap* and *chŏ saenap* to give lower pitch registers. The two additional versions were modeled on saxophones and used metal bodies (Kim T'aeyŏn 2001, 70–71). However, the *saenap sogakki* essentially rendered the *p'iri sogakki* redundant, or vice versa. Given that the *chang saenap* had been presented to Kim Il Sung, it could not be discarded in favor of a *p'iri* trio, so the compromise was to couple it with the two larger *p'iri* variants. A trio of *chŏdae* transverse flutes, the *chŏdae sogakki*, was arguably more successful. “*Chŏdae*” abandons the Sino-Korean characters rendered in South Korea as *taegŭm*, essentially returning to an older local name, *chŏttae* (this spelling remains in South Korea). Throughout the 1960s, the name was rendered as *chŏ'tae*, suggesting an amalgam of both earlier names. There was historical precedent for a *chŏdae* trio, in the large, medium, and small *taegŭm*, *chunggŭm*, and *sogŭm* used from the Unified Shilla (668–935) dynasty onward. The standard *chŏdae*, equivalent to the old *taegŭm*, is the largest of the three reformed instruments (Figure 2.3); the smaller *koŭm chŏdae* is pitched an octave higher, and the *chungŭm chŏdae* fits between the two. Ranges are chromatic, sounding (rather than written, since all three are transposing



Figure 2.3 *Chŏdae* (transverse flute). Photo by Keith Howard.

instruments)  $c'-g'''$ ,  $f'-c''''$ , and  $b''-f''''$ , respectively, divided on each into four registers, which on the *chōdae* comprise low ( $c'-f'$ ), middle ( $f'-f''$ ), high ( $f''-d'''$ ), and highest ( $d'''-g'''$ ). All three versions have birch or hardwood bodies replacing the bamboo of old, and all add plated keywork. All use a single tube in two sections, the top for the mouthpiece and the bottom for the finger holes, a copper joint between the two allowing fine tuning up and down to match other instruments in an ensemble. In the tradition, it was the *taegŭm* that tuned a traditional ensemble, but the *chōdae*, as does a Western flute, takes the tuning tone from the ensemble's string leader.

As a set, the *chōdae sogakki* is the equivalent of a Western alto flute, flute, and piccolo trio.<sup>39</sup> It has lost the most characteristic sound of old *taegŭm*: a raspy buzz created by a thin membrane that covered a hole between the mouthpiece and finger holes. The hole and membrane have been removed from reformed instruments, on the grounds that the sound should be, just as Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il demanded of singers, clear and lyrical. And, the *chōdae* trio are supplemented by two versions of a vertical notched flute, *tanso*, with chromatic ranges respectively sounding  $f'-g'''$  and  $b''-b''''$ . This adds a level of duplication to the *chōdae sogakki*. The *tanso* was formerly a simple bamboo tube with four finger holes and a thumb hole, and a further, larger, and therefore lower-pitched vertical notched flute had also been common, the *t'ungso*. While scholars routinely consider the *tanso* a Korean version of the Chinese *xiao*, the *t'ungso* had long been locally and variously produced. The *t'ungso* is the first wind instrument described in Chōe Ch'angnim's compendium of old instruments, *Ko akki* (1989, 5–9), on the grounds that it was "loved by people in the old days." But it struggled in the 1960s, partly because it came to be associated with shaman accompanists, "something that today's people do not like" (*Chosŏn ūmak* 1961/5, 42).<sup>40</sup> However, a composition featuring it, "*Shin-a-u*," was premiered before Kim Il Sung in March 1962 which celebrated the shaman connection: the first syllable, *shin*, signifies "spirit/god," although a discussion by Pak Ŭnyong in *Chosŏn ūmak* (1962/5, 32–43) attempts to shift the meaning, reimagining court processions last performed shortly before Japan declared Korea its colony. Pak's staunch defense failed, and mention of it drops from journals after 1966. Counterintuitively, the reformed *tanso* fared better. In both reformed versions, its cylindrical tube gained two additional finger holes to increase the tonal palette from pentatonic to heptatonic, and plated keywork covered five additional holes to give all chromatic semitones. Early versions retained bamboo, but these were soon replaced by acoustically less absorbent hardwood. Whereas old

*tanso* bodies were in a single piece, reformed *tanso*, like *chōdae*, have separate mouthpiece sections linked by a copper joint that allows tuning adjustment. Some keywork is reminiscent of the Western piccolo, but one key extends the range downward below the lowest open hole, and one hole to the right can be opened by keys operated by either left- or right-hand fingers. An additional hole to the top and left is opened by rotating the left index finger in a lateral arc, as with a Western clarinet. Kim T'aeyŏn (2001, 50–61) shows the development stages.

In 1992 I recorded a *tanso* student playing the traditional piece “*Chōngsōnggok*.” This piece, celebrated in South Korea as part of National Intangible Cultural Property 16, *Taegŭm chōngak*, evolved from the transverse flute (*taegŭm*) accompaniment to a literati lyric song. I have notated it elsewhere (Howard 2006b, 54–56). The student retained many old ornament techniques, including increasing vibrato as a tone progressed (as in court practice), but at the same time added vibrato to every long note (rather than, as in court practice, just to certain pitches). She increased vibrato pitch shifts more than would be possible with the old *tanso* (where the small notched blowing hole requires a focused embouchure). Her somewhat cavalier attitude to vibrato suggested the folk tradition. So did her use of ornamentation, since the palette of ornaments available to court flautists had been more complex and specialized, as it remains in South Korea (Howard 2015a, 311–13, 340). She used simple passing tones and approach tones, neglecting old rules for acciaccatura in which ornaments should descend in ascending melodic passages and ascend in descending passages. Still, she demonstrated how a traditional literati piece, once transmitted at the court music institute (and still transmitted, at today’s National Gugak Center in Seoul), could be rendered as national music without gaining an association with the flunkeyism (in respect to the “serving the great” element within *sadae chuŭi*) that North Korean ideology rejects.<sup>41</sup>

Generally, adding Western techniques to any national instrument increases the potential virtuosity. In respect to the *tanso*, articulation requires great breath control, as well as increases in tonguing and finger flicks. The opening of Kong Yōngsong’s composition “*Chōso ŭi pom*/Beginning of Spring” (1963), as printed in the workbook by Pak Hyōngsŏp (1983; see Notation 2.1, *tanso* solo part, omitting accompanying instruments), shows the result, combining melodic contours with fast repeated semiquavers articulated by tonguing and acciaccature involving finger flicks; these would be well-nigh impossible to achieve on a traditional *tanso*, not least because of its



**Notation 2.1** “*Ch’oso ŭi pom*/Beginning of Spring” (1963) by Kong Yŏngsong, opening, *tanso* vertical flute solo.

Source: Pak Hyŏngsŏp 1983, 257.

slow speaking speed.<sup>42</sup> At the same time, and despite the potentials given by the reformed instrument, the old pentatonic palette is largely retained, along with notions of pre-tone acciaccatura and vibrato that—counterintuitively, since it stems from the abandoned court tradition of old—is confined to certain tones. The coverage of the instrument in the journal *Chosŏn yesul* suggests, however, that a long debate took place about the Western/national balance, and about what ornamentation could be retained.<sup>43</sup>

Sets of reformed flutes became an ensemble in their own right, as well as combining with Western instruments in revolutionary opera orchestras and other large-scale productions. However, rather than generating the claimed “third sound,” and rather than accompany dance, they were routinely used to add national color. This typically meant they gave solos or were featured when material derived from folk sources was used. Given the elitist origins of opera, incorporating reformed instruments while using them to iterate folk material justified identifying revolutionary operas with the people. Operas thus required sets of Korean and Western winds, and matched Korean with Western instruments, but where strings played alongside each other and combined to give a balance known as the *paehap kwanhyŏnak* style, Korean and Western wind instruments were separated. This satisfied Kim Jong Il’s requirement that composers should refrain “from using too many Western woodwind instruments [and] sustain the elegant and beautiful sounds of our bamboo wind instruments” (*On the Art of Music* 1991,

446).<sup>44</sup> Rhetoric, though, continues to argue that the Western flute is cold and high-pitched when heard on its own, but becomes softer and more forceful when played in unison with the *chōdae*.<sup>45</sup> Still, the combined sound of opera orchestras overwhelmingly remains Western, except when national wind instruments give solo parts. The acceptable mix is seen in the score for the people's opera "Yōnp'ungho/Yōnp'ung Lake" (1973), where the arrangement of wind instruments, top to bottom, runs *koŭm tanso*, *tanso*, *koŭm chōdae*, *chungŭm chōdae*, *chōdae*, flute, clarinet, *chang saenap*, *tae p'iri*, and *chō p'iri* (followed by Western brass, national zithers, and Western and national string instruments). Further, where operas use solo national *chōdae* or *tanso*, accompaniments tend to feature other national instruments, typically the *kayagŭm* zither, *ongnyugŭm* harp zither, and *yanggŭm* dulcimer. A piano and synthesizer might be added for balance, along with vibraphones and marimbas; saxophones, though, never became part of opera orchestras, because Kim Jong Il had declared them only suitable for "light music" (*kyōng ūmak*).

### The "hand wind zither"

In North Korea, except in orchestras, Western instruments accompany songs, and public concerts routinely feature Western orchestras. One instrument originating in Europe, although in its nineteenth-century development often considered a European take on Chinese mouth organs (C. *sheng*, K. *saenghwang*), has become spectacularly important: the *sonp'unggŭm* "hand wind zither" (C. *shoufengqin*). Classified in North Korea as a wind instrument, this is none other than the accordion. During the colonial period, Japanese accordions were imported and used in Korea and Manchuria. By the 1950s, instruments were mass-produced in both East Germany and China and shipped throughout the socialist world. In North Korea, the *sonp'unggŭm* was featured in compositions and arrangements from the post-Korean War years onward and was sufficiently iconic to be celebrated in an early 1960s song, "Sonp'unggŭm sori ullyōra/The sound of the Hand Wind Zither" (analyzed by Kim Hyōk in an article in *Chosŏn ūmak* 1962/9). It was taught at tertiary level, as a university training workbook dating to 1971 confirms,<sup>46</sup> by which time it was the "king of popular instruments" (*taejung akki ūi wang*).<sup>47</sup> It was taught to children (Figure 2.4) and performed by any number of groups. Most importantly, because it was portable, it could be used anywhere





**Figure 2.4** A teenager rehearses the *sonp'unggŭm* (accordion) at Man'gyŏngdae Children's Palace, 2000. Photo by Keith Howard.

and everywhere, whether as *répétiteur* for mass spectacle and mass dance rehearsals, as background support for work teams, or as an instrument with which to accompany songs. Today, somewhat sadly for those who yearn for Korean peculiarity, it is the accordion that is most frequently encountered on the streets of Pyongyang, as groups of students and office workers rehearse in every open space for the next festival. And, not least through a version of A-ha's "Take on Me," northern accordion ensembles have gained something of a cult following in international circles.<sup>48</sup> But, as I resist the temptation to offer the customary accordion jokes,<sup>49</sup> allow me to quickly move on.

### 3

## Pulling at Harp Strings

### Discarding the old?

If reformed instruments were to be associated with the masses, with the vernacular and the proletariat, this presented challenges in respect to some traditional instruments. Kim Il Sung had once addressed this:

In our country from long ago, the people developed music and dance. The people developed beautiful music with elegant dance and rhythm on the ancestors of *kayagŭm*, *kŏmunŏgo* and so on. (cited in Chŏe Ch'angnim 1989, 30)

But the *kŏmunŏgo* six-stringed fretted long zither, plucked with a plectrum, had long been associated with the literati, at least since the late fifteenth century, when the treatise *Akhak kwebŏm* was compiled. So, although a legend tells of its development during Koguryŏ times (traditional dates, 37 BCE–668 CE) on territory that is now North Korea, it was never reformed. Chŏe's book, *Ko akki* (1989), removes all mention of it, except in the uncensorable quotation from Kim Il Sung, so that blank spaces are left where it once appeared in the text. It is also omitted from the large compendium *Chosŏn minjok akki* (Pak Hyŏngsŏp 1994). However, both texts claim to list all instruments that had been rendered obsolete, including a large variety of instruments imported to the Korean court from the Chinese Sung court in 1114 and 1116, which remain part of the Rite to Royal Ancestors and Rite to Confucius in Seoul. There appears to have been uncertainty over whether the *kŏmunŏgo* was to be considered a national instrument or not. It is pictured, alongside obsolete Chinese-originating court instruments, in a second 1989 compendium (Pak Myŏngil 1989), and it also appears in the *Chosŏn minjok akki togam* (Kim T'aeyŏn et al. 2001). It also features in several ensemble compositions for national instruments published in two volumes of scores covering the period from the 1960s to the 1990s, *Chosŏn minjok ūmak chŏnjip: Tokchugok chip*.<sup>1</sup>



Largely, though, the *kōmun'go* disappeared from public view in the mid-1960s. By then, protracted discussions about its future were underway. It had great historical significance, and had been given pride of place over other stringed instruments in the neo-Confucianist *Akhak kwebōm*. It was the instrument for which most surviving historical notations, created by and for the educated elite, had been made. But, in addition to its now undesirable association with the court and literati elites, it failed to match the lyricism and smoothness demanded of national music by Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. So, it had to be criticized:

The specific way of using a plectrum to sound the *kōmun'go*, the leather beneath the strings, and the way that the plectrum strikes the strings, all create a percussive sound. To retain the sound and timbre in a reformed *kōmun'go* means it cannot be used in an ensemble, or in an orchestra to accompany theater performances. (Pae Chōngil, *Chosōn ūmak* 1966/10, 25–26)

The musician An Kiok, encountered in Chapter 2, was a famous *kōmun'go* player, although he was associated with reforming the *kayagum*, traditionally a 12-stringed long zither with moveable bridges, which he also played. Three recordings of An playing the *kōmun'go* in Pyongyang survive, one made sometime after 1956 that was later issued on cassette, and two commercial LP recordings (Columbia XM-19-AM, issued in 1968; Chosun Records ka-60319, undated).<sup>2</sup> The *kōmun'go* appeared a number of times in the pages of *Chosōn ūmak*—as a “popular” (*taejung*) instrument in April 1964; an instrument for the folk-art melodic genre of *sanjo* in September 1965; and as the solo instrument for a new composition by Kim Yongshil, “*Ch'ulgang*,” discussed in the 1966 article already cited. In fact, the journal published the score of Kim's piece without commentary (*Chosōn ūmak* 1966/8, 38–40), and then gave the composer space for a program note (*Chosōn ūmak* 1966/11, 31). Kim relates how the zither produces characteristic Korean sounds, “depicting the beautiful evening atmosphere of our country, fitting close to our bosom.” He takes characteristic rhythmic cycles (*hwimori*, *anttang*), and bases a middle section on folk song. Clearly, there were arguments ongoing, although the challenges of creating a reformed version soon proved fatal.

Another long zither, the *ajaeng*, with its origins more than a thousand years ago in China, also struggled. Its difficulties were not to do with literati culture, but rather because bowing its thick, wound silk strings produced a complex timbre that Chōng Pongsōk characterized to me in his remark

cited in Chapter 2 as “*aeng, aeng, aeng*.” It could not blend in ensembles with Western instruments, or, *inter alia*, with reformed national instruments. In fact, Chŏng was dutifully citing, although he did not tell me, a 1964 speech of Kim Il Sung:

A shortcoming of our national instruments is that they produce creaky sounds. It seems that since the croaky voice was used in singing,<sup>3</sup> instruments were made to suit it. Some comrades are against reforming our national instruments, but there is need to do so. With unreformed Korean instruments, we can neither modernize national music nor fully express the sentiments of the people of our age.<sup>4</sup>

The Sino-Korean character for the “*a*” (C. *ya*) of *ajaeng* has been interpreted to mean “creak,”<sup>5</sup> because the strings of the *ajaeng* imported to Korea at the beginning of the twelfth century from China were sounded using a bow of rosined wood—forsythia was the favored wood in the Korean court, and continues to be used in South Korea.

A smaller, second version of the *ajaeng* had developed in the early twentieth century, adding a second soundboard, a hinged stand, and using a bow borrowed from the cello (with horsehair replacing rosined wood). Ch'ae Kyeman (1915–2002), a Chindo Island musician I studied with in the early 1980s after he had been appointed “holder” (*poyuja*) for a southwestern shaman ritual as National Intangible Cultural Property 72, told me how he had used this instrument for 30 years to create incidental music for theater companies, since it could be bowed, plucked, and used to generate all manner of sound effects. Again, the South Korean folk music scholar Yi Pohyŏng (b. 1937), in a discussion with me in October 2014, recalled that the prototype for this second *ajaeng* had been made by Kim Ponggi and commissioned by Pak Sŏngok. Pak was an ensemble musician during the colonial period who specialized in accompanying the Korean staged opera genre known today as *ch'anggŭk*.<sup>6</sup> This is the version of the instrument discussed in Chŏe's *Ko akki*, although Chŏe illustrates both the seven-stringed older court instrument and the nine-stringed second version. Chŏe indicates that the *ajaeng* had been reformed before Kim Il Sung's speech abruptly curtailed its use—it is last mentioned in *Chosŏn ūmak* in June 1964. Chŏe justifies its loss with the simple comment that it duplicated other national instruments (1989, 33), but the reality is not so simple. Four reformed versions had been developed: a four-stringed bass (*chŏ ajaeng*), a lightly modified standard

eight-stringed version (*so ajaeng*), a larger 12-stringed *tae ajaeng* (Ch'oe 1989, 31–35; see also Hwang Chich'öl 1994, 237), and an in-between 10-stringed *chung ajaeng* (depicted in Kim T'aeyön et al. 2001, 40–41). These, according to Rim Tongsuk (in *Chosön ūmak* 1962/10, 14–16), were intended to collectively form the core string section of national orchestras.

The *kōmun'go* could have been reformed to be less percussive, more lyrical, and more able to handle fast music, as the South Korean scholar Hwang Chunyön argues (2002, 197). But the requirement to follow directives from above rendered such developments impossible. In a 1982 tract, Kim Jong Il reiterated that resurrectionism or revivalism should be avoided: people must “distinguish between what is progressive and popular and what is obsolete and reactionary in our cultural legacy. . . . [We must] discard the obsolete and reactionary and retain the progressive and popular.”<sup>7</sup> This justified discarding many instruments that are still found in South Korea, particularly those that had originally been imported from China for court use but had never gained currency among the general populace. Ch'oe's *Ko akki* thus provides a catalogue of almost every instrument apart from the *kōmun'go* that had been abandoned in Pyongyang: *chi* (transverse flute with raised mouthpiece), *saenghwang* (mouth organ with gourd/metal wind chamber), *so* (panpipes), *ch'ök* and *yak* (vertical notched flutes), *hun* (globular ocarina), *ragak* (conch shell horn<sup>8</sup>), *taejaeng* (15-stringed long zither), *kūm* (seven-stringed long zither; C. *qin*), *sul* (25-stringed long zither), *ulla* (small chime set), *panghyang* (horizontal metal bar set), *p'yŏnjong* (clapperless bell set), *p'yŏngyŏng* (stone lithophone set), *t'ükchong* and *t'ükkyŏng* (single clapperless bell and single stone lithophone), *pak* (clappers), *ö* (tiger scraper), *ch'uk* (box), *pu* (pottery vessel brushed with a split bamboo stick), a great many barrel drums and pellet drums (*chwago*, *chölgo*, *chin'go*, *kön'go*, *kyobanggo*, *ch'ünggo*, *sakko*, *ünggo*, *ryŏnggo*, *rwigo*, *rogo*, *to*, *rodo*, *rwido*, *ryŏngdo*, *ryonggo*),<sup>9</sup> and an assortment of bells.

*Ko akki* is, however, a product of its time. It includes instruments that had by the 1980s been superseded as others were developed, such as the *t'ungso* notched flute, introduced in Chapter 2. It also includes two developments from the *kayagūm* zither, the *kahyŏnggūm* and *chogūm*; a round-bodied lute, *wŏlgūm*; and three ancient harps, the *sogonghu*, *sugonghu*, and *wagonghu* or *taegonghu*. Obsolescence presented few problems where instruments were solely used in abandoned court rituals and banquets. Texts such as the *Chosön minjok akki togam* list discarded instruments and indicate that examples are preserved in Pyongyang museums (Kim T'aeyön et al. 2001,

96–117), but some of the illustrations given are so inaccurate as to question whether every instrument has actually been preserved; given that the court was in Seoul and court rituals were performed in Seoul, there is little reason to assume every instrument made its way to Pyongyang.

However, *kömun'go* and *ajaeng* zithers resonate with music beyond the court, the former due to its Koguryö-based foundation legend—North Korea, after all, sits on former Koguryö territory—and the latter because of its widespread use as a folk instrument. Musicians I have interviewed in Pyongyang hint that both zithers are still taught and played away from public view. One, who I must refrain from naming, talked about this in June 1992:

You have been to the folklore museum in Pyongyang. Just as with folklore, we preserve music from the past in our music university (*ŭmak taehak*). There, we still play the old zithers, the *kömun'go* and *ajaeng*. But you should realize that people who live in our country are modernized. We wear suits and ties. If we followed old customs and kept old music, we would fall into nihilism, and would wrongly celebrate the aristocracy who once controlled Korean music.

I have never, though, seen either zither played in Pyongyang. As I wrestled with the conundrum that yes-no responses to their continuing existence presented, I had this exchange with Chöng Pongsök and Ri Ch'anggu, again in June 1992:

HOWARD: Do people still play old Korean instruments?

RI: Yes, they do.

CHÖNG: People no longer practice how to play them.

HOWARD: Do you mean that only the music university preserves the instruments?

RI: Well, we do keep instruments that we have never attempted to reform. Such instruments include the *kömun'go* and *ajaeng*, but they are not used much today. We can use them in orchestras if we need to. You can still hear them when you visit the Pyongyang Music and Dance University.

HOWARD: There are old *qin* and new *qin* in China, which co-exist . . .

RI: Well, if that's the case, then I would have to say that old Korean instruments do not fit with our view of modern society. We have to reform instruments so that they meet modern tastes. This is no different from the viola de gamba, which was once played in Europe, but which isn't any more.

HOWARD: Nowadays, many people in the movement for the “historically informed performance” of Baroque music play the viola de gamba. It is in use . . .

CHŎNG: As I’ve already said, music must be dedicated to establishing the future of our society. Music cannot say to people, “Go backward! Go backward!” It needs to encourage people to move forward. So, our instruments have to be reformed to be part of our progress.

The implication in this exchange, that old instruments continue to be learned, was again indicated to me in April 2000 by the senior *haegŭm* fiddle performer, Han Namyŏng:

We still have them, but we do not need many players. In order to keep playing old instruments such as the . . . *kŏmun’go*, *ajaeng*, and *t’ungso*, we recruit one student every three years. Such instruments are suitable for playing old music but do not fit modern tastes. We only need a few specialists in order to preserve old playing styles.

North Korean scholars and musicians must balance what is considered appropriate for public presentation with what may be maintained privately. This follows Kim Il Sung, who in his 1964 speech, as he sounded the death knoll for the vocal genre of *p’ansori*, commented,

Of course, I do not mean to say you should not sing *p’ansori* at all . . . it would be a good thing to retain one *p’ansori* singer out of a hundred. We should preserve *p’ansori*, but there is no need to encourage it. (*Selected Works* vol. 4, 1971, 160)

### Retaining the national zither, *kayagŭm*

The *kayagŭm* zither remains the most important national instrument in North Korea’s public performance culture. It retains its importance partly because Kim Il Sung favored its sound. Partly, though, its importance comes from the song-plus-zither genre of *kayagŭm pyŏngch’ang*, reflecting the central place that songs occupy in Pyongyang (Figure 3.1). In earlier times, this genre was associated with courtesans and mixed *p’ansori* excerpts with songs about geography, nature, and the like, all suggesting reasons to question its



**Figure 3.1** *Kayagŭm*, played by a group of school children at Man'gyŏngdae Children's Palace, 1992. Photo by Keith Howard.

continued use within the ideologically driven socialist state. But, like popular folk songs, *kayagŭm pyŏngch'ang* featured on many SP recordings issued during the colonial era, giving the genre familiarity to those who came to occupy positions of power. Hence, the *kayagŭm* is still used widely; it has been an integral part of opera orchestras since the 1970s and is often found supplementing other national instruments in ensembles.

The origins of the *kayagŭm* trace back two millennia. Zither-like wooden remains uncovered in 1997 and 1998 in South Korea have been dated to between the first century BCE and the first century CE (Howard, Lee, and Casswell 2008, 17–22), and while such remnants require careful interpretation, two ancient terracotta figurines incorporate a zither with the distinct “ram’s horns” (*yangidu*) to which the strings of a *kayagŭm* are attached at their lower end. One of these has been dated to the reign of King Mich’u (r. 261–284), while the other, on a long-necked vase discovered in 1974 in Kyŏngju, the southeastern capital of the ancient Shilla kingdom (traditional dates 57 BCE–668 CE), dates to a century or so later (Yi Hyegu 1957, 367; Pratt 1987, 237–38). A legend reported in the twelfth-century *Samguk sagi* (History of the Three Kingdoms) associates the zither with the sixth-century

U Rūk, a musician from the Kaya confederation in the center-south of the peninsula who escaped to Shilla as Kaya was overthrown. Legend has it that he invented the instrument because the Kaya ruler, Kashil, felt that since the local language was not Chinese, local music should also be distinct. This legend leads to the claim that the *kayagŭm* is a purely Korean instrument, although it is very similar to the Chinese *zheng*. Two *shiragi koto* (J. for “Shilla *kayagŭm*”) are preserved in almost perfect shape at the Shōsōin repository in Nara, Japan, dating back to the eighth-century Emperor Shōmu, and marking the *kayagŭm* as distinct from but closely related to the Japanese *koto*. Only the Korean zither has “ram’s horns,” and in its oldest version (the version today known in South Korea as the court instrument, the *chōngak kayagŭm*, “correct music zither,” or *pōpkŭm*, “law zither”) these are fashioned from a separate piece of hardwood such as red sandalwood attached to the lower end of the paulownia body.

A second, smaller, folk instrument has existed since at least the nineteenth century. This compresses the ram’s horns and incorporates separate sides and a back of hardwood behind a paulownia soundboard. Both traditional types are tuned to pentatonic scales. Both have movable bridges (*kwae*) shaped like two-toed “wild geese feet” (*kirogi pal*) beneath silk strings (*hyōn*), with spare strings held in coils behind a loop at the top of cords that are then wound around the ram’s horns. North Korea based its reformed zither on the second, smaller instrument. This was the instrument that musicians who moved to North Korea, including An Kiok and Chōng Namhŭi (1905–1984),<sup>10</sup> played for *kayagŭm sanjo*, the genre for melodic instrument and drum that An had learned from the person considered to have first devised it, Kim Ch’angjo (1865–1918). Tellingly, texts for the unreformed instrument continued to be published well into the 1960s; the last I know of, by Kwōn Yōngdae and giving fingering and ornament exercises but also notating *sanjo*, dates to 1966.

Attempts had been made to modify the 12-stringed *kayagŭm* before the end of the colonial period. Some replaced the coils of strings and the ram’s horns with pegs that made tuning easier. Others replaced silk with metal strings. Modified instruments were known under a number of names that included *kahyōngŭm*—combining “*hyōngŭm*,” an old name for the *kōmun’go*,<sup>11</sup> and the first syllable, “*ka*,” of *kayagŭm*—and *chogŭm* (Hwang Chunyōn et al. 2002, 202). According to her daughter, the noted South Korean *sanjo* performer Sōng Kŭmyōn (1923–1986) began to use a modified instrument with 15 strings when in her twenties; others suggest her instrument only had 13 strings, like the *koto*.<sup>12</sup> The *chogŭm* inherited in Pyongyang had 13 strings



and was shorter in length than the standard *kayagŭm*. Mounted on a pedestal, this was reformed as a 16-stringed instrument in the 1960s (Ch'oe Ch'angnim 1989, 38–41; *Chosŏn yesul* 1968/5, 1968/12).

In Pyongyang, experiments to develop the *kayagŭm* involved increasing the strings from 12 to 13, 15, 18, and 19, before the 21-stringed standardized instrument emerged. One report even describes an electric version (*Chosŏn yesul* 1971/7). Many of the modifications seem to parallel how the *zheng* was reformed in China: metal pegs were added to allow tuning with a key rather than fastening cords, and nylon rather than silk strings were used to reduce the likelihood of breaks.<sup>13</sup> Nylon limits the pliability of strings and so restricts how much vibrato can be used. A box at the lower end encloses the pegs, replacing hardwood ram's horns. The basic range of two and a half octaves of old instruments has been slightly extended, to one note short of three octaves (F- $\epsilon''$ , transposing as a B $\flat$  instrument and written an octave higher, that is, g-f''), and strings are tuned to a diatonic scale rather than the pentatonic arrangement of old instruments. The range divides into low, middle, and high registers, each spanning roughly an octave. Separate folding legs have been added at the lower end to allow the instrument to be played seated rather than, as with traditional versions, on the floor. Modifications, though somewhat later, have also been made in South Korea, in their many iterations replacing cords with pegs; replacing silk with nylon strings; changing the materials used for bridges, resonators, and pegs; enlarging the zither to a 25-stringed instrument; and in one case adding a device to control tuning (Howard 2015a, 135–39). In 1990 a trio of reformed *kayagŭm* emerged in Pyongyang, the small *koŭm kayagŭm*, midsized *chungŭm kayagŭm*, and large *chŏŭm kayagum*; at the same time, a trio, the Saeul Kayagŭm Trio, was making waves in South Korea.

Compared to South Korean zithers, northern instruments tend to favor fixed or relatively steady pitches, although techniques such as vibrato and *ttŭldong*, an ornament made by flicking the string, are retained. Northern musicians focus on a greater fluidity of line, and tend to reject the serenity associated with slow movements, such as the 25-beat-per-minute *chinyangjo* (18/8) opening of *sanjo*. The focus for southern musicians is at the opposite end of the continuum, since contemporary *sanjo* players extend *chinyangjo* because its slow tempo allows for a concentration of emotion imparted by layering ornamentation such as acciaccature and rising or falling portamenti after a tone is plucked (techniques known as *t'oesŏng* and *ch'usŏng*). In Pyongyang, the focus on melodic lines and faster tempi reduces



ornamentation but encourages a greater use of tremolo. In both South and North, reformed zithers are able to play triadic harmony, using both left- and right-hand fingers to pluck strings where traditional performers only plucked with the right. Hence, in North Korean orchestration guides, repeated and arpeggiated chords, fast flurries, and tremolos form the majority of the sampled techniques (e.g., Pak Chŏngnam 1990, 62–64). These are illustrated in myriad repertoire pieces, so, if one compares the zither arrangement of the 1963 piece “*Chŏso ūi pom*/Beginning of Spring” with that given for *tanso* flute excerpted in Chapter 2, the harmonic implications of what on *tanso* are single melodic notes are worked out using both left- and right-hand fingers, rising arpeggios are shared by both hands, acciaccatura are played on adjacent strings, and an open dominant in the bass is plucked by right-hand fingers while left-hand fingers offer decorative melodic flurries. Little is left of traditional ornamentation. However, my characterization marks the period to 2000. A return to ornamentation more typical of older times began at the beginning of the new millennium, which is today typically encountered in solo repertoire where harmonization with the voice or other instruments is not a concern.<sup>14</sup>

### Creating stringed instruments, from old to new

The two zithers, *kŏmun’go* and *ajaeng*, were discarded partly because it was deemed difficult to reform their timbres for ensemble use. The ensemble requirement followed Soviet practice, as outlined in Chapter 2, but also had a local dimension. Toward the end of the Japanese colonial period, Kim Kisu (1917–1986), who had trained at the colonial-era court music bureau, the *Aakpu*, began to create pieces for orchestras of traditional instruments.<sup>15</sup> In his compositions, Kim translated Western structures into Korean equivalents, devising a methodology that has been employed in South Korea ever since. The Western string division of violin, viola, cello, and bass became a fiddle (the *haegŭm*) and three zithers (*kayagŭm*, *kŏmun’go*, and *ajaeng*), with wind instruments being used to sustain or reinforce melodic lines. While a single wind instrument (or groups of a single type of wind instrument) can carry a melody, the four stringed instruments, in their traditional forms, have contrasting—clashing—timbres and use distinct ornamentation, and thus struggle to create a harmonic wash: nasal, song-like bowed *haegŭm* tones with sharp but narrowly defined pitch ornaments contrast

plucked *kayagŭm* tones of short duration coupling to ornaments that raise or lower the pitch at the beginning and end of a tone, percussive *kŏmun'go* tones sounded with a plectrum linking to ornaments featuring octave jumps, and creaky *ajaeng* sounds.<sup>16</sup>

In Pyongyang, changes in construction and adjustments to playing techniques allowed reformed instruments to blend in ensembles. However, while the *Ko akki* statement cited above about discarding the *ajaeng* because it duplicates other instruments makes some sense, score collections published in the 1960s indicate an atmosphere of tolerance and experimentation. One 1962 score collection, *Minjok kwanhyŏnak kokchip* (Collection of Pieces for National Orchestra), contains pieces by Ri Kŭnsu, Shin Yŏngchŏl, and Chŏng Seryong for combinations of up to three sizes of *ajaeng* and three distinct *haegŭm* fiddles, plus two sizes of *kayagum*, the *yanggŭm* dulcimer and *chogŭm* zither, three *p'iri* oboe, two *tanso*, two *chŏdae*, a *konghu* harp, four sizes of *ragak* trumpets, a *pip'a* lute, and two instruments associated with the already abandoned court music (the *panghyang* tuned iron slab set and *ulla* tuned lipped gong set).<sup>17</sup> Again, although the *pip'a*, like the *konghu*, had long been obsolete across Korea, a 1966 collection of dance compositions and arrangements featuring national instruments, *Muyong kokchip: Minjok kwanhyŏnak chŏngbo* (Dance Piece Collection: Scores for National Orchestra), includes four sizes of the *pip'a* lute in one piece, “*Ture norae*/Song of Collective Labor,” along with the *ulla*, *konghu*, three sizes of *ajaeng*, and three *p'iri*. And a 1969 collection, *Minjok kiak kokchip* (Collection of Pieces for National Instruments), mixes song arrangements by composers such as Sŏng Tongch'un, but still includes two *ajaeng* sizes, three *p'iri*, as well as the *chang saenap* shawm and *saenghwang* mouth organ, three sizes of *ragak* trumpet, and the *wagonghu* harp.<sup>18</sup> The third of these was published five years after journals last mentioned the *ajaeng*. Again, while the first published score of the composition “*Chŏso ūi pom*/Beginning of Spring” (1963) for *tanso* flute and an ensemble of national instruments features an *ajaeng*, the same piece arranged in Pak Hyŏngsŏp's 1983 workbook (the solo *tanso* part of which is excerpted in Notation 2.1) replaces the *ajaeng* with an expanded part for three *haegŭm*.

Over time, the drive to standardize the orchestral string section was resolved using four sizes of *haegŭm* fiddle. The process began in the 1950s, when the *haegŭm* underwent some initial development both in Pyongyang and among the Chinese Korean population in Yanbian. In Yanbian, it became a four-stringed instrument in three sizes (in terms of pitch ranges,

high, medium, and low), with bodies flattened and enlarged as if imitating a rectangular violin. In Pyongyang, as outlined in the journal *Chosŏn yesul* (up to and including 1968/12), it became a three-stringed fiddle with the body enlarged and slightly reshaped, and violin "f" holes added to the soundboard. Similar developments had already happened elsewhere, such as in Mongolia and, based on the Mongolian instrument but following instructions from Moscow to create ethnic orchestras, across the border in Buryatia (Siberia). In both Yanbian and Pyongyang, bows were redesigned to reflect how the bow had to be drawn across the strings. The traditional *haegŭm* is a two-stringed spiked fiddle, and, as with instruments of this sort all across Asia and into Islamic North Africa, the bow passes between the strings. The player tenses the bow differently when drawing it against the string closest to the body or pushing it against the string furthest away. Once more than two strings are used, the bow has to be separated from the strings, drawing across the strings above the soundboard. The traditional structure lacked a fingerboard and used a paulownia soundboard as a resonator, which, combined with the hand-tensed bow, generated the *haegŭm*'s harsh, nasal sound. Even though Kim Il Sung insisted that Korean instruments of old were rich, colorful, and expressive, reformed instruments needed to moderate the *haegŭm*'s timbre.

In Shanghai during the Nationalist period, the equivalent fiddle, the *erhu*, which in itself had already been reformed to increase its flexibility (by, for example, changing the soundboard and sound-box material and construction), was further developed into a set of instruments to serve as the equivalent of a Western orchestral string section. The first reformed *haegŭm* in Pyongyang followed the *erhu* route, rejecting the Yanbian modifications by keeping the basic shape of a circular sound box<sup>19</sup> and curved neck, resisting the addition of a fingerboard, and adding a third string to increase the range. By the end of 1962, a set of four *haegŭm* was being proposed (*Chosŏn ūmak* 1962/12, 8–10), although it had not been agreed whether the soprano version (the *so haegŭm*), should have three or four strings. The three-stringed version remained for some years, but by 1969 the four-stringed version had replaced it. This instrument had an ebony or blackwood fingerboard backed with birch,<sup>20</sup> and strings were pressed against a fingerboard rather than tensed in midair as on traditional instruments, making it much easier to produce steady pitches (Figure 3.2). It had wire strings with lateral pegs, rather than silk (wound metal strings were used for lower-pitched strings on the larger versions). Soundboard bellies were softwood, *so haegŭm* retaining



Figure 3.2 *Sŏ haegŭm* (fiddle). Photo by Keith Howard.

the paulownia of old, though the two largest versions needed the greater strength offered by spruce (as on Western equivalents). The sound box sides and back were ginkgo, spruce, or hardwood rather than the bamboo of old, and the sound box was sealed at the back to enclose an amplifying body of air. The old practice of lining the sound box with acoustically damping earth was abandoned, and sound holes were added to the belly or sides. A raised bridge defined the lower sounding length of strings toward the base of the soundboard.

Early *so haegŭm* experimented with using a separate bridge made from gourd, as on old instruments, but this was soon replaced by wood, with the bridge attaching to a sound post that passed through the sound box to the belly in order to increase resonance. At the top end, a fixed bridge defined the sounding length beneath the pegs, replacing a loop of thread on old instruments. A partial coil of maple, walnut, or hardwood topped the instrument beyond the pegs in an inverted echo of a violin scroll. This had a practical use for the *so haegŭm*, since the scroll served as a hook from which to

hang it. At the base, strings were stretched and held by a brace. Bows similar to Western equivalents were tensed mechanically with a metal frog rather than, as with old instruments, by hand.

The four versions are *so haegŭm*, *chung haegŭm*, *tae haegŭm*, and *chŏ haegŭm*. Since 1970 at the latest, each has had four strings, tuned to match equivalent Western instruments, notated as E'-A'-D-G (*chŏ haegŭm*; matching the double bass—notated one octave higher), C-G-d-a' (*tae haegŭm*; cello), c-g-d'-a'' (*chung haegŭm*; viola—notated using the C clef as with the viola), and g-d'-a''-e'' (*so haegŭm*; violin). Each has four registers, low, medium, high, and very high. Note that each is a B♭ transposing instrument, so the open strings sound one tone lower than notated. The smallest matches the basic Chinese *erhu*, the *chŏ haegŭm* the Chinese *dagehu*, and the *chung haegŭm* the Chinese *diyinggehu*. Reformed *haegŭm* are factory made, and so are standardized, with the *so haegŭm* measuring 692 mm (± 5 mm) from the tip of the neck above the pegs to the base, with a sound box 167 mm tall by 172 mm wide and 159 mm deep (all ± 1 mm), and a string sounding length from the fixed bridge below the pegs to the bridge above the soundboard of 325 mm (± 2 mm). The equivalent measurements for the *chung haegŭm* are 680 mm, 198 mm x 198 mm x 85 mm, 340 mm (± 1.5mm to 5mm); for the *tae haegŭm*, 1,177 mm, 424 mm x 424 mm x 190 mm, 665 mm (± 2 mm to 8 mm); and for the *chŏ haegŭm*, 1,790 mm, 600 mm x 600 mm x 225 mm, 1020 mm (± 3 mm to 13 mm).

The *haegŭm* was first recorded with a horsehair bow threaded between its two silk strings in the fifteenth-century *Sejong shillok* (Annals of Sejong, compiled 1452–1454), and this is how it is given in the 1493 treatise *Akhak kwebŏm*. The instrument had, however, been present in Korea earlier, and the retrospective text *Koryŏsa* (History of the Koryŏ Dynasty, 1452)<sup>21</sup> indicates it arrived from the Chinese Sung court in 1124, at which time the Chinese equivalent, the *xiqin*, used, like the *ajaeng*, a bow of rosined wood. By the fifteenth century, alone among Korean instruments, the *haegŭm* incorporated all eight materials in the Chinese “eight sound” (K. *p'al ūm*) classification system: a bamboo resonator and bamboo neck, frontal wooden pegs and a paulownia soundboard, a metal base plate and spike, silk strings, a gourd bridge, a leather hand-piece to the hand-tensed bow, rosin on the bow, and a coating of crushed stone inside the sound box. This is the instrument that survives in South Korea. The instrument has a raspy sound with considerable noise elements in sound envelopes, and the lack of a fingerboard means that precisely tuned pitches are difficult to maintain. Strings are tuned a fifth

apart,  $\flat'$  and  $\sharp'$ . Melodies are typically contained within a narrow range, because of the difficulty of rapidly shifting the hand position along the strings without a fingerboard to provide a guide. Additional pitches are facilitated at a single fingering position by pulling the strings toward the neck to raise the pitch by one or two pentatonic degrees. Four hand positions are prescribed, giving a total two-octave range ascending from  $\flat'$ . The two lowest strings of North Korea's reformed *so haegŭm* are tuned a minor third lower (f and c' but, given transposition, written as g and d'). However, it is generally thought that at the time of the two fifteenth-century court documents, tuning was roughly a third lower, so it could conceivably be argued that the *so haegŭm* adopts historical precedence, although to suggest this as a reason for the northern decision would contravene the prohibition against resurrectionism.

It is tempting to suggest that the family of four *haegŭm* was designed to match Western orchestral strings. They play alongside and usually duplicate Western strings in revolutionary operas. Some orchestral scores replace the *chung haegŭm* group with a second group of *so haegŭm*, matching the division between first and second violin sections in Western orchestras. And the equivalence is made explicit in a national instrument textbook written for school students (Song Kwangchŏl and Yun Yŏnghwal 1985), where identical tuning, registers, fingerings, and even exercises are given for Western strings and *haegŭm* equivalents. Not surprisingly, the equivalence has been noted by several South Korean commentators (e.g., Yi Chonggu 1989, 59–103; Kim Ŭlgon 1995, 195–230). Certainly, decisions made in respect to tuning match Western equivalents too closely to be coincidental. Nonetheless, Kim Il Sung demanded that the identity of Korean instruments must be maintained:

You shouldn't modify national instruments after the pattern of Western instruments. If you make national instruments similar to Western ones, they are national instruments only by name, not [in reality]. Our national instruments produce elegant sounds favorable to Koreans; however, if they produce the din of Western instruments, they lose national characteristics.<sup>22</sup>

Hence, the equivalence is routinely denied in Pyongyang.

Looking closer at the development sequence, some distinctions are evident. The first reformed *haegŭm* had three strings, not four, indicating that experimentation began before any imitation of the violin was attempted. Some experiments added leather to the soundboard, while others adjusted

the sound box profile. By 1969 the fourth string and a base support had become standard. Again, *Chosŏn ūmak* (1962/12) gives open string tunings for the two largest instruments, the *tae haegŭm* and *chŏ haegŭm*, that are different from those of the cello and bass—G-c-f<sup>23</sup> and F<sup>#</sup>-B-E-a, respectively. But at the turn of the 1970s, and in time to provide a complete string section for the first revolutionary opera, “*P’i pada*/Sea of Blood” in 1971, the set of four instruments, tuned to match Western strings, was in place. Subsequently, because a greater volume of sound was needed, the *so haegŭm* was further modified, with redesigned soundboard holes and a sound post added (running from bridge to sound box belly). Those I have talked to in Pyongyang nonetheless indicate some concern about the apparent imitation of Western strings. In July 1992, Pak Chŏngnam, then a member of the National Instrument Reforming Collective, told me of plans to develop the *haegŭm* further. But by April 2000, when Han Namyŏng explained the development process to me, nothing more had been done:

We thought about how the reformed *haegŭm* could provide the string section of an orchestra, combining harmonic textures with counterpoint (*poksŏn*). We did not pay much attention to Western orchestral strings and their tunings at the time . . . although I admit that when we added the fourth string to the fiddles it could be interpreted as copying. What did we think about this problem? Well, it didn’t matter to us, since our aim was to follow our own national history while creating something modern. Sometimes, we might elect to make an instrument similar to something Western, and there is nothing to stop us doing so. No, because if our method of making an instrument creates something suitable for our people and our music, it is good. And, with the combination of instruments that we now have, we are no longer restricted in any way. So, where we used to listen to Western orchestral music, now our people can listen to an orchestra of our own instruments.

Players of the traditional *haegŭm* usually sit on the floor, supporting the base of the resonator with the toes of the right foot above the left knee, while North Korean musicians sit on chairs, playing with the *so haegŭm* and *chung haegŭm* resting on their thighs, using a support distinct from violin and viola chin supports. This is not much different from Western viols, Moroccan violins, or the contemporary Chinese *erhu*. Despite this, Han was dismissive of how the violin playing position had been adapted in India, laughing as he ridiculed the idea of resting such an iconic shape on the thigh.<sup>24</sup> The base



support anchors *so haegŭm* and *chung haegŭm* in position, and the volume of sound can be moderated by moving an instrument closer to the body to slightly increase the volume or away from the body to decrease it. The larger *tae haegŭm* and *chŏ haegŭm* have spikes that stretch to the floor; both cello and bass have similar spikes, but we should remember that the traditional *haegŭm* is also technically a spiked fiddle by virtue of a metal post running from the base of the neck through the sound box.

Some elements of the old *haegŭm* soundworld have been abandoned, such as the noise associated with exciting a silk string as it is bowed. But much is made of the claim that Korean identity has been retained, particularly through the use of vibrato, *nonghyŏn* (or *nongŭm*). The traditional *haegŭm* created vibrato by pulling and releasing strings, using the thumb as an anchor on the neck. With the addition of a fingerboard, such techniques have had to be rethought, using lateral movements of the fingers against the fingerboard and string. Han demonstrated to me both a shallow and rapid (*yŏt'ŭn*) vibrato reminiscent of that used by violinists, and a wide (*kip'ŭn*, “deep”) vibrato suiting slow music. He considered the latter came from the local tradition and was unlike any violin technique. He demonstrated how the more emotional and heavily ornamented *kyemyŏnjo* mode (with its Western “minor” feel) required the deeper type of vibrato but the more declamatory and less ornamented *p'yŏngjo* (major) typically used the shallower type. In doing so, he compared, though he never explicitly admitted to doing so, the old, but in North Korea discarded, southwestern folk-song singing style with popular folk songs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Equivalents to specific ornaments that a traditional *kayagŭm* player would call *chŏnsŏng* and *tŏesŏng* remain, now described as *kkŭlsori* and *mibunŭm*. For a player of the traditional *kayagŭm*, these involve stretching or pulling the string with the left hand beyond the bridge to raise or lower a pitch, and for traditional *haegŭm* players they require both complex bowing techniques and pulling strings toward the neck. But on the reformed *haegŭm*, either the finger slides along the string (a typical *kkŭlsori* slides up and down a tone or more) or the slide is coupled with a switch of finger. Han identified two further ornament techniques: *kullim sori* for trills on adjacent pitches, and *kyŏlsori* pre-tone ornaments formed by single or group acciaccatura, the latter being somewhat reminiscent of the tradition.

The *so haegŭm* is virtuosic, far more so than a traditional *haegŭm*, but in this it inevitably tempts us to compare it with a violin. Ri Ch'anggu's mention of Fritz Kreisler's studies cited in Chapter 2<sup>25</sup> is given contemporary resonance in Notation 3.1, where the demanding cadenza of a concerto based on “*Arirang*,”



ad lib.

*f*

*cresc.*

*p*

*cresc.*

*f*

*cresc.*

**Notation 3.1** Cadenza from “*Arirang*” concerto for *haegŭm* fiddle. Unattributed.

Source: Han Namyŏng 1983, 336.

the best known of all Korean folk songs, mixes double stops to create dyads outlining a harmonic skeleton with rapid switches between staccato and legato, as well as semiquaver passages that involve dexterous fingers. This calls for far greater virtuosity than “Beginning of Spring” asks of the *tanso* flute (for which, see Notation 2.1), but, similarly, it doggedly retains the old pentatonic palette. It drops ornamentation—including vibrato—and typical bowing techniques of old in favor of techniques that surely derive from the violin. Few of these would be feasible on a traditional *haegŭm*. Many of these same violinesque elements have been incorporated into updated *so haegŭm* versions of *sanjo*, the melodic-instrument-plus-drum folk-art genre where, today, virtuosic etude-like passages and long scalic and arpeggiated melisma contrast ornamentation and vibrato techniques carried over from Korean tradition.

A considerable solo repertoire has been introduced for the *so haegŭm*. Eight pieces are notated in the technical workbook (Han Namyŏng 1983, 317–84). Two are substantial: one, as excerpted in Notation 3.1, being an unattributed arrangement of “*Arirang*,” and the second based on the song “*Uri ŭi tonghaenŭn chok’ido haji*/Our East Sea Is Good.” “*Arirang*,” notated over 40 pages, begins *lento*, the first two ensemble phrases being answered by ornamented solo *so haegŭm* phrases. The *so haegŭm* soon takes up the familiar melody, extending the final phrase with an extemporization that, rather than cadencing, resolves to a faster, *allegretto* ensemble repeat of the melody before a solo cadenza.<sup>26</sup> The development section features an abundance of arpeggios, and then a slower *largamente* statement of the melody draws the piece to its close. “Our East Sea Is Good” similarly begins with a slow introduction leading to an unadorned melody statement, and a development section leads to a final *largamente* where the *so haegŭm* plays the melody in octaves—octaves are virtually impossible to play on a traditional *haegŭm*. The workbook adds seven shorter, less complex, works for *chung haegŭm* and *tae haegŭm*, and four for *chŏ haegŭm*, most of which Han Namyŏng is responsible for. Born in 1947, Han was 15 when he began to study with Ryu Taebok (1907–1964), an instrumentalist, dancer, and composer who had worked in Seoul before settling in Pyongyang in the 1930s, and who was appointed a merit artist in 1957.<sup>27</sup> Han’s first composition was “*Pangmonggonggi pulgŭn maŭm*/The Red-Minded Carpenter,” written after graduation in 1969. Other compositions include an arrangement of *sanjo* (1976), the folk-based “*Kinari*” (1980), and “*Ch’osŏlgok*/First Snow” (1982), based on the folk song “*Toraji*/Bellflower.” He also contributed idiomatic *haegŭm* parts for the opera “Sea of Blood” (1971).

### Discarding and creating lutes and dulcimers

While the *haegŭm* family reflects, at least in part, earlier Chinese developments matched to Western orchestral strings, a family of lutes once found in Korea, but which largely fell into disuse several centuries ago—the *tang pip’a*, *hyang pip’a*, and *wŏlgŭm*<sup>28</sup>—was initially reformed to parallel the *haegŭm* quartet, as *so pip’a*, *chung pip’a*, *tae pip’a*, and *chŏ pip’a*. Experiments first took place during the early 1960s at Pyongyang Music and Dance University. Although traditionally a plucked lute, a plate inside the cover of the November–December 1965 issue of *Chosŏn ūmak* tantalizingly shows three *pip’a* versions, each with a bow. But the *pip’a* was never used in revolutionary opera orchestras, and by the early 1970s it had disappeared from view.

Two decades later, Kim Jong Il decided that more work should be done, perhaps cognizant of the mix of *dombra* and *balalaika* in archetypal Russian/Soviet orchestras, and by the late 1990s another plucked lute began to be promoted, the *ŏn’gŭm*. Although commentaries indicate this lute was first developed back in the 1960s, the first published discussion I have found on this instrument appeared in the November 1998 issue of *Chosŏn yesul*. Then, and in the veritable clamor of articles that followed (in *Chosŏn yesul* 1999/7, 2002/5, 2002/11, 2005/10, 2006/3, 2006/6, 2006/7, 2006/8, 2006/11, 2007/1, 2007/3, 2009/6, and 2009/7), it was closely associated with Kim Jong Il and with the military within the military-first policy of *sŏngun*. A workbook, *Ōn’gŭm kyoch’ukpon*, was published in 2002.<sup>29</sup> The new instrument redesigned the *pip’a* as a pear-shaped four-stringed lute in four sizes, small *so ŏn’gŭm*, medium *chung ŏn’gŭm*, larger *tae ŏn’gŭm*, and large *chŏ ŏn’gŭm*. The last of these, rounding out the pear-shaped sound box, was akin to the Chinese bass *daruan*, and quickly dropped from regular use only to reappear recently (see Figure 2.1). The pitch ranges of the first three match *so haegŭm*, *chung haegŭm*, and *tae haegŭm*, but in place of bows, the three *ŏn’gŭm* use plectra. This gives distinction, allowing them to replace the *haegŭm* if desired. Rather than being subsumed, as the *haegŭm* set is, within a string section dominated by the Western violin family, the plucked *ŏn’gŭm* allow a “third sound” to finally be heard, arguably meeting the ideological requirement imposed many years earlier.

The *yanggŭm* dulcimer offers something of a contrast. It is believed to have arrived in Korea from China at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>30</sup> Jesuit missionaries are associated with its importation to China, and a Korean scorebook dating to 1817, giving the alternative name *kurach’ŏlsa kŭm*, provides an early reference while indicating European (*kura*) origins.

The dulcimer is capable of considerable virtuosity in Eastern Europe and the Middle East (for which, consider the Iranian *santur*), but virtuosity seems to have leached away as the instrument traveled eastward. In today's South Korea, the *yanggŭm* is placed on its trapezoid case on the floor and struck with a single bamboo beater, merely sounding the main notes of a melody without elaboration. Virtuosity, however, was reintroduced to the instrument in mid-twentieth-century China, and from the 1950s onward across the border in Soviet Siberian republics. Hence, as Kim Kilhwa pointed out in interview with me at the Pyongyang Music and Dance University in 2000, there were good reasons to reform it in North Korea, by mounting the frame on legs and playing the strings with two beaters. As with older instruments, it today retains two choirs of strings. One choir passes from pegs on the left over the raised edges of a first bridge, through gaps beneath a second bridge, to pins at the right; the second choir does the same in reverse, so that the two bridges alternate raised edges and gaps. Strings can be tuned on both sides of a raised bridge. Whereas older instruments had a pentatonic  $\mathfrak{c}$  to  $\mathfrak{a}'''$  range, the reformed instrument expanded this, settling by 1970 on a chromatic  $\mathfrak{c}$ – $\mathfrak{a}'''$  range across 22 double strings. Instruments from 1960, 1970, and 1980 are illustrated in *Chosŏn minjok akki togam* (Kim T'aeyŏn et al. 2001, 34–37), pointing to three phases of reform. The repertoire settled into sets of solo and ensemble pieces, but, unlike in China, the emphasis remained primarily on ensembles, where the *yanggŭm* typically plays melodies, duly ornamented with fast unison repetitions and trills, coupling these to simple counterpoint. The latter made the dulcimer a useful accompaniment to solo national wind instruments in revolutionary operas. But in some ways it remained a “feudal instrument”—to cite how Han Namyŏng put it to me—that struggled to create the sustained harmonic textures expected from accompaniment instruments within the new language of North Korean music. This is downplayed in the technical workbook by Ri Myŏngsuk and U Chinyŏn (1985), where the focus is on solo pieces and exercises, but may indicate why a new instrument was considered necessary. That new instrument, which I introduce below, was the *ongnyugŭm*. First, though, I must briefly move beyond stringed instruments.

### Drums of persuasion

There is much potential variety inherent in the construction of percussion instruments, whether membranophones or idiophones, hence the available

texts (e.g., Ch'oe Yŏngnam and Maeng Ch'ŏngjŏng 1988; Kim Chiyŏn et al. 2001, 287–93) and audiovisual materials offer pointers rather than comprehensive coverage. Four percussion instruments have ubiquity throughout Korea, being found in *nongak* local percussion bands and their equivalent (but extinct) itinerant, professional, and semiprofessional iterations.<sup>31</sup> These comprise two drums, the hourglass-shaped double-headed *changgo* (or *changgu*) and the squashed barrel drum *puk*, and two gongs, the large *ching* and small *kkwaenggwari* (additional names exist for both gongs). Local percussion bands are discussed in several early North Korean texts (e.g., Muljil munhwa yumul pojŏn wiwŏnhoe 1955, 82–88; Ri Hirim 1979, 51ff), but the focus gradually turned to dance emanating from such bands (e.g., Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi 1958; Ri Hyeran 1994) as the association of farming communities with songs increased. A revival of interest, albeit positioning Kim Il Sung and state bodies as the champions of *nongak*, emerged at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, as South Korea petitioned for percussion bands to be included as a pan-Korean item on the UNESCO representative list of intangible cultural heritage (see, e.g., Kim Sŏnyŏng 2013, 196–218, Mun Sŏngnyŏp 2015, 198–205).

The two primary drum types are generic. In the past, barrel drum bodies were made from hollowed-out slices of trunk or from slats of wood glued together, with the two calf or pig skins stretched and held in place by rivets or by interlacing from one head to the other with leather thongs or rope. The body could be painted, lacquered, or smoothed to cover joints and blemishes; the drum body might be covered with hide. The depth of the body varied. In North Korea, since factory production has replaced artisanal skills, construction has become uniform: rivets join skins to the body and the body is painted red—much as in China, but something rarely encountered in South Korea, where red was formerly a color associated with the court. Drum bodies are of paulownia, spruce, pine, or fir; skins are calf, pig, or horse. Drums can be suspended vertically or mounted horizontally, with one skin uppermost on a stand. Five sizes of *puk* are distinguished in the workbook *T'a akki* (Ch'oe and Maeng 1988, 191–93): large *taebuk* (800 mm in diameter and 500 mm in depth), two medium *chungbuk* (600 mm x 300 mm, and 500 mm x 250 mm), and two small *sobuk* (400 mm x 200 mm, and 300 mm x 150 mm). While this indicates what factories produce, experiments have generated additional instruments.

The *changgo* has a distinct hourglass shape. Although known in China from at least the Han dynasty 2,000 years ago, and although a narrow-waisted

equivalent in Japan, the *tsuzumi*, has long existed, the *changgo* is considered a local instrument in both North and South Korea. This is most likely because of its ubiquity. The body is fashioned by turning a single piece of wood on a lathe or by joining two bowls together at the waist to give the hourglass shape. The body can be varnished, oiled or—fitting factory production—painted. The two skins overlap the circumference of each bowl, and their shape is maintained by stretching them over metal loops that extend beyond the bowl circumferences. The two skins are laced together using hooks attached to the loops. Coupling crisscross lacing to V-shaped leather thongs allows the skins to be put under tension. Traditionally, skins were typically of dog or horse, with calf or pig sometimes used for the lower-pitched drumhead. Drum sizes have always varied; in broad terms, smaller, lighter instruments are favored by dancers, and larger, heavier instruments by accompanists. Within the tradition, accompanists use the open palm to strike the lower-pitched head, and a single whip-like thin stick, the *yŏl ch'ae*, to strike the higher-pitched head. Percussion bands have, at least since the mid-twentieth century, added a second stick, the mallet-shaped *kunggul ch'ae* (also known as *kunggŭl ch'ae*, *kung ch'ae*, *k'ung ch'ae*, and so on). While paulownia remains the favored wood for South Korean *changgo*, North Korean instruments may substitute other softwoods; skins typically remain of horse, calf, or pig for the lower-pitched head, and sheep, roe deer, or dog for the higher-pitched head. Design experiments have taken place, replacing wooden bodies with aluminum or, for small instruments, plastic, substituting man-made skins, adding metal ratchets to the body that tighten chords and thereby put skins under tension, mounting drums on stands, and adding a third stick—the *sal ch'ae*, the wire brush of Western drumkits.<sup>32</sup>

Manufactured *changgo* in North Korea, according to *T'a akki*, have standardized bodies measuring 630 mm from one bowl to the other ( $\pm 4$  mm). The larger bowl produces a thud at a lower relative pitch and is 235 mm in diameter and 270 mm deep, while the smaller bowl produces a higher pitch tuned by the thongs between the drumheads and is 225 mm by 250 mm. This leaves a central waist between the two bowls of 170 mm. The two heads, overlapping the bowls, are 468mm and 453mm in diameter, respectively. These measurements prescribe an instrument longer but thinner than most contemporary South Korean *changgo*, but somewhat similar to drums made until recently for accompanists in the central Kyŏnggi Province. In North Korea, while the *yŏl ch'ae* stick is retained from earlier times, the second stick, the *kunggul ch'ae*, is given a round bulb like those of rubber xylophone beaters

(in South Korea, musicians prefer discs of wood or hard plastic). Playing techniques have expanded, adding damping, a second, looser hold on the *kunggul ch'ae*, and turns of the *yŏl ch'ae* wrist and arm. The looser *kunggul ch'ae* hold allows strikes of the lower-pitched head to be strengthened: where the South Korean hold, kept since the mid-twentieth century, has the stick firmly gripped between the fourth and little finger and falling vertically from the joint between thumb and index finger—a technique that facilitates the stick striking both drumheads with minimum effort—the reformed technique grips the stick with the third and fourth fingers. By changing the *yŏl ch'ae* arc in northern practice, it too is able to strike both heads, although a 180-degree turn of the stick is required due to its small bulb (the bulb is used as the striking point). The turn is marked with a "C" in northern notations, while damped tones are given with an "x" replacing the notehead, but the actual improvements such techniques give seem marginal in terms of music, and are designed more for aesthetic reasons, hence relate to dance.

In Pyongyang, the *changgo* is associated with music from the folk tradition. Hence, *changdan*, rhythmic cycles with points of accent or stress and strong downbeats within metrical units, remain central constructions. Workbooks craft exercises and folk song accompaniments for each *changdan* (e.g., Chŏe and Maeng 1988, 65–145): *chungmori* and *chungjungmori* (respectively, medium- and moderately fast-paced 12/8, accented on ninth quaver/eighth note), *tŏngdŏkkung* (medium-paced 12/8, four trochaic long + short [crotchet/quarter note + quaver/eighth note] groups), *yangsando* (moderately fast 9/8, after a folk song of the same name), *t'aryŏng* (moderately slow 12/8, accented ninth quaver/eighth note followed by an empty final dotted crotchet/dotted quarter note, typical of mask dances), *anttang* (fast 4/4, accent on sixth quaver/eighth note), *kutkŏri* (dance-like 12/8 divided into two 6/8 halves), *ŏnmori* (moderate 5/8), *chajŭnmori* (*chajinmori*, fast 12/8), *hwimori* (fast 2/4 or 4/4), *salp'uri* (moderate 12/8 but featuring hemiola that create a 6/4 feel), *chinyangjo* (slow 18/8, accenting the last two dotted crotchets/dotted quarter notes), *ryŏmbul* (slow 18/8, associated with Buddhist lay chants), and *todori* (*todŭri*, moderate and fast 18/8).

Two hourglass-shaped drums from earlier times that had not been in use for several centuries were revived in the 1990s. *T'a akki* (1988) does not mention them and *Ko akki* (1989) lists them as obsolete. These are the *kalgo*, which has two sets of thongs to allow each skin to be tuned, and the narrow-waisted *yogo*. The advantage that the first gives over a standard *changgo* is questionable, since the lower-pitched head is always at relative pitch and never needs to match the pitch of a gong or any other instrument or voice.





**Figure 3.3** Drum set based on the *changgo* hourglass-shaped double-headed drum. Photo by Keith Howard.

Also, using pairs of thongs on the same laces, rather than single thongs, has negligible effect. Ceramic bodies of *yogo* survive from the past, emphasizing their slender nature and indicating an aesthetic that links their revival in North Korea primarily to dance, although experiments have hung them from above (evoking Buddhist temple iconography) and substituted skins that do away with the overlap and metal rings of *changgo* (evoking sundry West African drums). A further development has been to create drum sets based around *changgo* (Figure 3.3),<sup>33</sup> in which large *changgo* are mounted on legs and placed horizontally as bass drums, small variants of *changgo* cut the hourglass in half at the waist and are mounted either horizontally or vertically to become the equivalent of bongo drums or temple blocks, and so on. Some kits incorporate the *kkwaenggwari* simple lipped small gong to create a suspended cymbal equivalent, and remodeled *para* cymbals as hi-hats or crash cymbals.

### A new harp, or zither, or both?

The *ongnyugŭm*, named after a bridge over the Taedong River in Pyongyang, is essentially a harp and zither amalgam (Figure 3.4). Northern commentators





**Figure 3.4** Two *ongnyugŭm* (harp zithers); Kim Killwa (b. 1956) is on the left. Photo by Koryo Tours, used with permission.

consider its primary derivation to be from harps found in the archaeological record of the Three Kingdoms' period, Koguryŏ, Shilla, and Paekche (traditional dates, 18 BCE—660 CE).<sup>34</sup> Our knowledge about the use of such harps, though, is sketchy and is based, at least with respect to the territory of today's North Korea, on Chinese Sui documents and a few tomb paintings dating to the Koguryŏ period that, because the area in which they are found was once controlled as a Chinese commandery, may not actually depict anything Korean. From territory now in South Korea, a Unified Shilla-era (668–935) bell at Sangwŏn temple in Kangwŏn Province in the southeast dated to 714 CE depicts a harp in relief (Chang Sahun 1984, 421), and two harps from the southwestern Paekche are preserved in the eighth-century Shōsōin repository in Nara, Japan.

Three harp types are generally distinguished in Korean history: *sogonghu*, *sugonghu*, and *wagonghu*. Twentieth-century examples of all three are preserved at the National Gugak Center in Seoul, but rather than being Korean, these were brought from Beijing in 1937 by the musicologist Ham Hwajin. Nothing convincingly demonstrates that two of these, the *sogonghu* and *wagonghu*, were in Korea ever distinct from Chinese *gonghou* and *wagonghou*, harps that Zheng Jinwen had incorporated into his reformed Chinese ensemble in Shanghai. But it was these two that were revived in Pyongyang in the 1960s and used in the orchestra for the first revolutionary opera in

1971. The first, the small *sogonghu*, was a vertical harp with 13 strings, reminiscent of South Asian instruments. The second, renamed the *taegonghu*, was a large arched harp with integral sound box. The third harp, if it had been reintroduced, would have been the *sugonghu*, a vertical harp with integral sound box that in the example preserved in Seoul has 21 strings. The *sogonghu* was the most challenged of the three in terms of volume, since its strings attach to a horizontal arm and there is no sound box to amplify resonance. Indeed, both revived harps appear to have been hardly audible in the battery of instruments used for the opera. This may explain why they were replaced beginning in 1972, although in June 1992 Pak Hyönsöp, a former member of the National Music Investigation Committee, offered a different explanation when I interviewed him: after Kim Jong Il decided to revive the harps, it was realized that nobody knew how to play them, so they were combined with the Western orchestral harp to create a new instrument, the *ongnyugüm*.

The new instrument can certainly be conceived of as a harp placed horizontally, as if on a table, with modifications made to increase the range and overcome the volume limitations of earlier Asian harps. But the *ongnyugüm* also relates to the *yanggüm* dulcimer and *kayagüm* zither (and, in some commentaries, to its *chogüm* equivalent), combining elements of both with technical aspects of the Western orchestral harp. Three *ongnyugüm* versions have been developed. The first, with 29 nylon strings, was completed by 1972, adopting the *yanggüm* stand and modifying its trapezoid shape. In 1976 a second version took on a more swollen trapezoid shape (in manufactured form, 452 mm on the shortest side nearest the player, 1,367 mm on the side beneath the bass strings, 547 mm deep with the left side at 147 degrees and the right at 138 degrees to the shortest side). This expanded the sound box and added an oval sound hole (*ollim kumöng*, 170mm by 94mm). Four additional higher-pitched strings increased the range to C–g<sup>#''</sup>. A set of pedals was added, but these required a complex and temperamental operating system, so by 1990 a third version had been substituted. This extended the range to G'–a''' by adding four more strings (giving a total of 37 strings) and improving the pedal mechanism. All three versions use paulownia soundboards and maple (or other hardwood) bridges under middle and high register strings. The bridges modify, but are modeled on, the played “wild geese feet” of the *kayagüm*. Bridges define the sounding length of strings (to their right, running to an upper, main bridge) and allow the

player to introduce vibrato and other ornamentation, much as on the *kayagŭm*, but in a manner alien to Western harps. However, the first version needed to raise the bridge height beyond what a splayed foot could support from mid-range downward. This necessitated a new bridge design, broad-waisted with gently curving asymmetrical sides falling to two unsplayed feet, and notches on its top guiding the strings—similar to the fixed bridge on a cello. Although several were used for the second version, the third version only requires one such bridge, to carry the five lowest-pitched strings. The first *ongnyugŭm* replaced the two courses of strings on the *yanggŭm* with a single course, as on the *kayagŭm*; as with the Western harp, diatonic fifths and octaves were marked with colored strings. The second version increased the possible volume by inserting a flat second bridge running the length of the instrument under the *kwae* and above the soundboard. Through a cut in the soundboard, this anchored bridges to the belly, thereby agitating air in the sound box. But the anchor reduced bridge movement, as did the new bridge design with unsplayed feet, thereby limiting ornamentation. The result, as Kim Kilhwa told me, was that subtle pedaling techniques had to be invented to recreate *nonghyŏn* vibrato. One reason why the third version carries the modified splayed wild goose foot design further into the bass is to overcome the limitations of the new bridge design as much as possible.

The pedal mechanism in second and third generation *ongnyugŭm*, although operating on strings beyond the fixed bridge, is an evolution of Erard's nineteenth-century double action for the orchestral harp. Rather than Erard's two discs, it uses a single rotating fork, rather like a guitar *capo*, to increase or decrease the string sounding length. The seven pedals, *pyonŭm*, like the harp, operate on the seven diatonic pitches, and are held in a ratchet with three positions, connecting through a pulley mechanism to the strings above the soundboard. In the top position, “0” (standard, *chejari költök hom*), the pedal causes one arm of the rotating fork to stop the string at a small second bridge above (to the left of) the main bridge; in the middle position, “-” (flat, *naerim költök hom*), the fork is raised away from the string, so that the string length increases back to a third bridge, lowering the pitch; in the bottom position, “+” (sharp, *ollim költök hom*), a second arm of the fork stops the string just behind the main bridge, shortening the sounding length and raising the pitch.<sup>35</sup> In the third-generation instrument, much of the mechanism is hidden under a cover.

The *ongnyugŭm* has proved to be highly flexible. Kim Kilhwa (b. 1956) has been one of the most prominent musicians associated with it, and she was closely involved in its development. As a performer, initially playing the *kayagŭm*, she had won six national contests and been runner-up in two more by 2000. She wrote many of the exercises and studies still practiced by students, and was responsible for numerous arrangements and compositions. For her dedication, she was appointed merit artist. In an interview with me in April 2000, she characterized the sound of the *ongnyugŭm* as clear and melancholic, comparing it to what she regarded as the “lumpy” (*munnggul munnggul*) Western orchestral harp. She showed me how it could match the Western harp’s arpeggios, but also, particularly in the middle register, copy the short, plucked tones of the *kayagŭm*. She distinguished three registers, a resonant bass (low octave), a soft and elegant midrange, and a clear high register (top octave). In fact, Kim adapted *kayagŭm* techniques for the *ongnyugŭm*, but whereas a traditional *kayagŭm* player presses a string beyond the bridge to adjust its pitch as the string is sounded, an *ongnyugŭm* player can merely touch the strings.

The *ongnyugŭm* has a veritable armory of sounds, from short and percussive staccato to standard half-duration staccato; from trills, tremolos, and glissandi to a guitar-like picking of pedal tones below melodic lines or melodic tones above harmonic fills; from octave harmonics to taps on the soundboard. It has a greater range than the *kayagŭm*, and more fluidity than the *yanggŭm*. Across its five-octave range, it approaches the harmony-plus-melody ability of a piano.<sup>36</sup> Notation 3.2, an excerpt from the *ongnyugŭm* arrangement of the folk song “*Hwanggŭmsan paek toraji*/White Bellflower on Hwanggŭm Mountain”—a folk song already mentioned several times in other contexts, and which will feature below in Notation 8.1—illustrates its versatility. While this arrangement doggedly retains the pentatonic palette, regardless of the instrument’s diatonic abilities, a series of descending arpeggios flow to an ascending sequence of diatonic thirds in the introduction. G major chords, anchored by bass octaves, set up a rhythmic foundation, continuing beneath a melody featuring both single tones and tones supported by thirds and sixths. As a cadence approaches, the melody morphs into fast fragmentary passagework as the *tanmori* (4/4) rhythmic cycle of the opening mutates into a triplet-subdivided *semach’i* (9/8)—the rhythmic cycle of the folk song of old.

medium speed, ad lib.

a little faster

(...etc)

Notation 3.2 “*Hwanggŭmsan paek toraji*/White Bellflower on Hwanggŭm Mountain,” extract, arranged for *ongnyugŭm* harp zither by Kim Kilhwa (1988, 206).

The *ongnyugŭm* has been exported to Chinese Koreans, and from China it has been taken to South Korea, where, since the early 1990s, a number of musicians have played it. It is an instrument all Koreans can share, even though its origins sprinkle a mix of Korean harps, zithers, and dulcimers over

the Western orchestral harp. Reports in North Korean papers and journals claim, mirroring the reports on songs with which Chapter 1 opened, that it has become popular around the world. But while it is true that it has been performed in many countries, including in Italy, China, and France, “White Bellflower” has something naïve about it, reminiscent of Soviet piano music after Zhdanov’s 1948 clampdown, perhaps of Aram Khachaturian’s (1903–1978) *Piano Sonatina* (1959) or *Piano Sonata* (1961). There is, then, an elephant in the room: What remains that is identifiably Korean?

## 4

# Opera for the Revolution

Here, and in Chapters 5 and 6, I shift my focus to revolutionary operas. Within Western art music, opera is an elaborate theatrical genre in which character roles are taken by singers. It originated in Italy in the sixteenth century; Jacopo Peri's *Euridice* (1600) is the first opera score to have survived to the present day. North Korean revolutionary operas take the Western form but, learning from the Soviet Union and China, redefine it. Revolutionary operas are places of pilgrimage where the official history of the state is staged. They are shrines to the leadership cult of Kim Il Sung and, most importantly, exemplary expositions of *juche* ideology. To demonstrate the latter, I begin this chapter by backtracking to the point at which Chapter 1 ended, as *juche* began to infiltrate cultural policy, and briefly outline the ideology and how it was applied to cultural production. I then introduce opera plots, teasing out the distillation of meanings that operas present to domestic audiences.

Chapter 5 will develop my commentary, exploring parallel genres in China and the Soviet Union, and noting how little was known about Western opera in Korea prior to the end of the Pacific War in 1945. I introduce the traditional Korean genre of *p'ansori*, epic storytelling through song, a genre often glossed as "one man opera," and its twentieth-century staged equivalent, *ch'anggŭk*.<sup>1</sup> I ask how these, and specific singers associated with them, fared in Pyongyang, noting that after Kim Il Sung criticized *p'ansori*, it was essentially replaced with revolutionary operas. Both *p'ansori* and *ch'anggŭk* were (and in South Korea are) distinct from Western opera, but the terms *kagŭk* (song theater) and *ch'anggŭk* (sung theater) were initially used interchangeably for both Korean and Western forms in North Korea (see, e.g., Ri Hirim 1956); *kagŭk* subsequently became the standard term, with revolutionary operas rendered as *hyŏngmyŏng kagŭk* (revolutionary song theater) and the later people's operas as *minjok kagŭk* (people's song theater). Chapter 6 will analyze how revolutionary operas redefined the Western form. Briefly put, opera arias were first recast as songs, as the foundations and building blocks of operas. But revolutionary opera songs were designed to be portable so

they could be lifted out and rearranged in other contexts, where they retained the message—the “seed” (*chongja*; as a theory, *chongjaron*)—of the original song even after lyrics had been dropped. Second, the requirement of realism meant recitatives were abandoned, while offstage choruses (*pangchàng*) were introduced to comment on dramatic action. Third, as tools for state control, revolutionary opera audiences were made part of the spectacle.

### Preface: Juche ideology

Kim Il Sung stated in his report to the Fifth Congress of the Korea Workers’ Party on November 2, 1970, that

all revisionist elements and restorationist tendencies have been removed. Our writers and artists are all busy creating revolutionary literature and art works thoroughly based on the working-class line. . . . Our literature and art have become the literature and art of the Party, of the revolution, and of the people . . . and are becoming a powerful means in educating our working people along communist lines. (Kim, *Selected Works*, vol. 5, 1971, 423)

Revolutionary operas are the primary artistic statements of juche ideology. By 1971, when the first one premiered, juche was firmly established, and since revolutionary operas are routinely described as a complete art, fusing music, dance, theater, and spectacle, they demonstrate how the ideology permeated every element of cultural production. The impact of juche was felt most significantly through what, in another context, the musicologist Kofi Agawu characterizes as the “embrace of sameness” (2003, 169); hence the operas tell stories that blend facts with myths in order to support the official history of the state under its paramount leader. I briefly introduced juche in Chapter 1, and the emerging ideology sat behind my discussion of national instruments in Chapters 2 and 3. In Chapter 8, I will look at how juche impacted composers and composition, but here I provide an overview of the ideology.

The time that elapsed between Kim’s 1955 juche speech and the premiere of the first revolutionary opera in 1971 might suggest that, as Bruce Cumings (1997, 413) argues, the speech had something of a slow burn. Indeed, Brian Myers (2006) questions whether the speech marked the watershed that has been claimed. As late as 1981, a general history of Korea still treated the



speech as being of little significance, mentioning it “briefly and vaguely, not even referring to its precise name or date” (Lankov 1999, 53). However, the political purges that the speech (and the Chöllima campaign) unleashed were quickly felt, and lasted into the 1960s. So although *juche* as ideology can appear somewhat chimerical, and as a result has been portrayed by some as little more than “a farrago of Marxist and humanist banalities” (Myers 2006, cited in Lankov 2015, 70), it is more than this. “*Juche*” literally means “subject.” Alzo David-West cites three volumes of Kim Il Sung’s biography that sequentially define it as “independent stand,” “spirit of self-reliance,” and “principle of self-reliance,” and notes that all three are consistent with Stalinism, since they invoke party spirit (*partiinost*), national character (*narodnost*), and ideology (*ideinost*). The three also chime with Mao’s notion of people and their actions being the decisive factor, which had become key to his ideology by the 1930s—when Kim joined the Communist Party of China during his guerrilla years (2007, 138–40). The Japanese scholar Wada Haruki usefully offers a different three-fold division: personal, in which a person can achieve anything through effort; national, where the nation strives to be self-reliant; and monolithic, in which the people and the nation are ruled by an omnipotent leader (2002, 128–29). Jorgenson pithily sums up the whole complex with reference to Wada’s second element, as “culturally specific ethnic nationalism” (1996, 282), while Victor Cha (2012, 37–43) folds the first two elements together, stating that *juche* makes people masters of the revolution. But, as *juche* matured, the third component became central, replacing nationalist discourse with claim’s about Kim’s unsurpassable brilliance. Hence, to Kim Jong Il, Kim Il Sung gave *juche* both its uniqueness and its scientific basis, even as *juche* made the people subservient to the elder Kim as leader:

The *juche* idea is the Party’s unshakeable ideology that guides our revolution to victory. . . . [It] is a complete revolutionary ideology in that it considers the fundamental aim of the revolution to be the advocating and realization of *chajusŏng*, which is the life and soul of a man as a social being. . . . [It] is a fully scientific revolutionary doctrine for man’s emancipation . . . Kim Il Sung has established a man-centered philosophical outlook on the world for the first time in history.<sup>2</sup>

Kim Il Sung exhorted his people to “inherit the tradition of single-hearted unity and be unfailingly loyal to the party,”<sup>3</sup> but in this he nailed himself, as leader, to the ideology. As his son later put it:

The historical process in which the *juche* idea was founded covers the period from the time when the beloved leader . . . embarked on the revolution to June 1930. In this period, he discovered the truth of the *juche* idea . . . and proclaimed [it] to the whole world . . . after verifying its correctness through practical struggle. . . . The leader saw through the mistakes of the communists and nationalists . . . and took a road different from theirs. . . . Drawing on serious lessons derived from such flunkeyism and dogmatism, the leader clarified the truth that a revolution should be carried out . . . in an independent and creative way. (Kim Chang Ha 1984, 17–18, citing Kim Jong Il)

For the roots of *juche* to be claimed in pre-liberation days, it had to be linked to Kim’s guerrilla activities in Manchuria. More precisely, although not entirely consistent with North Korean claims, it can be interpreted as a reaction to the bloody Minsaengdan incident, in which Korean Communists were purged by their Chinese brethren, who believed their bases had been infiltrated by Japanese spies. Somewhere between 500 and 2,000 Koreans were killed, and Kim was one of the few leaders to escape, and then only because a senior Chinese official vouched for him. The incident lasted from late 1932 until early 1935 and left a residue of bitterness. When the guerrillas who survived were subsequently pushed out of Manchuria to the Soviet Far East by the Japanese, not only was the Korean nationalist movement weakened, but its remnants, including Kim Il Sung himself, were left with a permanent distrust of the Chinese (Hongkoo Han 2013, 34–36).<sup>4</sup>

*Juche*’s roots are, however, more complex than this, and in part appear to have originated somewhere other than with Kim Il Sung. This can never be admitted in Pyongyang, but certainly *chajusŏng*, defined by Kim Jong Il in his *On the Art of the Cinema* as “an attribute of man who desires to live and develop independently as master of the world and his own destiny” (1973, 330), was far from a new idea. It was not even exclusive to North Korea, since in the 1960s, with suitable Sino-Korean characters attached to establish a historical precedent, the Park Chung Hee regime in South Korea used it to resurrect discourse from the 1920s about the homogeneity of the Korean race, cultural indigeneity, and efforts toward self-sufficiency. It can be backdated earlier still, to the understanding of national identity that emerged in the 1890s during and after the Sino-Japanese war within the Seoul-based Independence Club (T’ongnip hyŏphoe) and its short-lived *T’ongnip shinmun* (*Independence Newspaper*). It can be found at that same time in Ch’oe Kyŏnghwan’s *Taedong*

*yŏksa*, a five-volume history that set out to prove Korea was once an equal to China, and is evident in Chu Shigyŏng's 1898 grammar of Korean, *Kugŏ munbŏp*.<sup>5</sup> It can conceivably even be linked to earlier intellectual disputes about reform and modernization among Confucianist *Shilhak* scholars.<sup>6</sup>

By the 1920s a loose grouping of cultural nationalists (*munhwa undong*) coalesced together to promote indigenous roots for things Korean. Among them were the writers, thinkers, and folklorists Chŏe Namsŏn (1890–1957), Yi Nŭnghwa (1865–1945), Son Chint'ae (1900–?), and Song Sŏkha (1904–1948) (Janelli 1986). At the same time, Yi Kwangsu's (1892–1950) manifesto, *Minjok kaejoron* (Treatise on the Reconstruction of the Nation), argued that reconstruction would grow from national characteristics, but that salvation—and independence from Japan's colonial hold—depended on building a state based on Western models. Cho Manshik, in a nod to Gandhi's self-sufficiency philosophy, had within a few years set up a society to promote Korean production. Much of the territory that *juche* later came to occupy, then, had been set out. But cultural nationalists lost influence after they were labeled bourgeois by left-leaning writers such as Shin Sangu in the early 1930s (Robinson 1988, 78–136), and in North Korea by the 1950s they were regarded as treasonous collaborators with Japan. Indeed, mystery surrounds the fate of Yi Kwangsu, who in 1950 was marched northward from Seoul to face trial but perished before reaching Pyongyang.

*Juche*, as a political ideology, had multiple roots. And it took time to mature. But by the early 1960s its impact on cultural production in Pyongyang was considerable. In respect to music, it started to appear in the pages of the journal *Chosŏn ŭmak* in 1958, and by 1960 it was thoroughly embedded.<sup>7</sup> It was fully worked out, even though not yet consistently applied, by the time of an unattributed volume published in 1963 by the Korean Literature and Arts Federation, *Hyŏndaesŏnggwa uri ŭmak* (The Present Day and Our Music). By the mid-1960s, it had become a totalizing mechanism for production, requiring all art and literature to be popular, representative, and revolutionary. This, it was claimed, was demanded by workers and by their representatives in the Korean Workers' Party. In other words, art and literature represented the people, but it was also supported by the people. Hence, its creators had to learn from the people, but also had to reflect the ideology of the party (Yi and Sŏ 2013, 25–34).

*Juche* became unchallengeable as further purges of artists and writers began around the time of the 1967 sixth plenary session of the Central Committee. From then onward, no dissenting voices can be found in the pages of the key

journal, *Chosŏn yesul* (Korean Arts), or in the final editions of *Chosŏn ūmak* before it ceased production in March 1968. Juche’s tentacles spread ever outward. Discussions about it were repeatedly held in institutions and organizations. Standardization came as Kim Jong Il took the helm of cultural policy, as, in respect to music, retrospective accounts such as Ri Hirim et al. (1979), the 13 volumes of *Chuch’è ūmak ch’ongsŏ* (Juche Music Collection; various authors, 1990–1992) and *Chuch’è ūi ūmak yesul riron* (Juche Musical Art Theory; Yi Yongdŭk and Sŏ Chaegyŏng 2013) all demonstrate. It needed policing, and music yearbooks published during the 1980s (the *Chosŏn ūmak ryŏngam*) included detailed annual reports on how it was being applied (e.g., 1985, 26–32, 1986, 54–62, 1987, 64–70). Note that the standardized account reflects a public face and may hide much, but when exploring North Korean music and dance, we do not yet have the benefit of hindsight, such as that available to those who study the Chinese Cultural Revolution, where cultural production once interpreted as homogeneous and stagnant is now described as “hybrid and transcultural” or as a “continuous revolution” (Mittler 2012, 187–88, 384–87).<sup>8</sup>

Juche made songs central to music production, even more so than had been the case during the previous two decades. Ideologues now required song lyrics to contain ideological messages—the “seeds”—but they rationed themes and sentiments: lyrics should celebrate the leader or the party, be defined by workers and the revolution, or focus on the reunification of Korea. Hence, musical settings must unambiguously foreground the message, reflecting, through rhythm and meter, the emphases of spoken Korean, and using, much as in Soviet practice, a harmonic language based on unencumbered major/minor tonality. Where multipart textures were employed, these should build from consonant thirds, fifths, sixths, and octaves, avoiding dissonance (Kim Nanhŭi 2015). Official rhetoric had it that singers’ skills would, as a result of applying these principles, be continuously improved, ever more efficiently projecting the messages. Folk songs were regarded as the roots of vocal practice, since by definition folk songs were popular, were loved by the people, and were embedded in history or described the life of workers. Folk songs, it was considered, contained the Korean *pat’ang*—special features that marked the Korean character, disposition, and temperament (Rim Kwangho 2014, chap. 3). Therefore, and as Chapter 1 outlined, folk songs were collected from elder citizens, transcribed, and analyzed. Old people, though, had grown up in Korea’s feudal and colonial past, so folk songs needed to be reformed to reflect the contemporary socialist reality (that is, to be popular,

representative, and revolutionary). Vocal style was to be based on folk songs, but it must meet the expectations of gentleness, elegance, lightness, and clarity, all of which were claimed to be required by the people. Vocal—and instrumental—production therefore kept a gentle vibrato, but heavier vibrato and pitch bending, along with most ornamentation, was abandoned. Gruffness, nasal resonance, and raspiness was removed, effectively abandoning regional distinctions, but also spelling the end for the hoarse vocalization of the domestic precursor to opera, *p'ansori*.

Specific songs were established as models (a list is given by Yi Yongdük and Sö Chaegyöng, who state that revolutionary songs written prior to the 1945 liberation could also be used as models; 2013, 52–53, 57). Model songs were brought together in the first volume of *Chosön ūmak chönjip* (1982; see Chapter 1), and commentaries on these, highlighting ideological features rather than musical elements, are given in two unattributed volumes published by the Munye ch'ulp'ansa (Culture and Arts Publishing House), *Chosön myönggok haesöl chip* 1 and 2 (1982, 1983). A third *Chosön myönggok haesöl chip* volume (1984) outlines how accompaniments should be standardized on the basis of those for model songs. Folk songs were developed (see, e.g., Nam Yöngil 1991, 42–97; Anon. 2001), nodding to the *shin minyo* and *taejung kayo* inheritance (see, e.g., Chöe Ch'angho 2003), and much as instruments were reformed for ensemble and orchestral use, a plainer vocal delivery was deemed better suited to choral settings (see, e.g., Ko Sangmi 2015). New vocal styles had been proposed prior to the emergence of *juche* (e.g., Kim Hiryöl 1955; Pak Ŭnyong 1955) but the new homogeneous style promoted a silky and smooth vocalization, typically given in a relatively high tessitura (as outlined in Wön Hüngryong 1963). Resonance came by using the chest voice and projecting through the frontal lobes (without nasal vibrato, and not adopting Caruso's top-of-the-head projection). The vocal style is often known as the *chuchè ch'angböp*, the “*juche* voice.”<sup>9</sup> In, too, came standardized deportment, with a set of movements and gestures still familiar from many a YouTube clip: rigid holds, militaristic steps and salutes, open bodies with hands stretched out in expansive gestures, head held high, and an almost *sprechstimme* delivery for speech to complement song.<sup>10</sup> Conformity to the rhetoric, the “rules,” brought music creators and performers cultural authority and political status, and gave access to resources. But conformity removed feedback and abandoned any market mechanism, thereby isolating the ideology but maintaining control. In this, North Korea is perhaps little different from other totalitarian states, since, to cite three examples, much

the same argument has been made by Verdery (1991), Wedeen (1999), and Adams (2010) with respect to Romania, Syria, and Uzbekistan, respectively.

### Introducing revolutionary operas

The first revolutionary opera, “*P’i pada*/Sea of Blood” (a.k.a. “Phibada”), premiered at the Pyongyang Grand Theater on July 17, 1971. It was based on an earlier film of the same name and later became a symphony.<sup>11</sup>

Since 1971, Pyongyang has on occasions marketed “Sea of Blood” or one of the other four revolutionary operas to foreign tourists. The website of Koryo Tours, a travel agency set up in 1993 that has long facilitated exchanges,<sup>12</sup> until recently offered this commentary:

All operas are full-scale, large cast efforts with amazingly high production values [that] . . . have sustained their popularity over the decades. All of them of course contain strong political messages that reflect the issues concerning the country at the time of their writing up until the present day, and people of all ages attend the shows frequently.

The [first] opera was adapted from Kim Il Sung’s immortal classic masterpiece, “Sea of Blood.” . . . It was Kim Jong Il who discovered the original work. . . . He set it as the gem of the idea of the opera to turn the victims of the bloody repression into brave fighters, and provided meticulous guidance to the creation of the opera.

Tourists have reported on revolutionary operas encountered while visiting Pyongyang. One wrote,

The opera was a wonderful experience, the production value alone is very hard to describe. It was three hours long with an interval; we left at half time because we could not understand any of it and consequently it got boring. But . . . in short, if you get the opportunity to go to the Opera House—GO!<sup>13</sup>

The website of Koryo Tours has in the past pointed out that many Chinese have a soft spot for North Korea’s operas, because they are the “real thing,” whereas China revamped its equivalents after the Cultural Revolution ended. That soft spot was witnessed in 2009, when the Sea of Blood Company embarked on a Chinese tour. According to the *New York Times*, they were

met by a veritable media frenzy. Chinese media followed the company almost paparazzi-style . . . giving rave reviews to its operatic production of the classic Chinese novel “Dream of the Red Chamber,”<sup>14</sup> [calling it] “the biggest hit since *Avatar*.” Audiences were equally enthusiastic. Tickets to the opera’s initial four-day run in Beijing sold out so fast that a second run was added. . . . The 198 members of Sea of Blood toured the country, filling theaters from Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, to Fuzhou, Fujian, with tickets in many cities sold out weeks in advance.<sup>15</sup>

“*Hongnumong*/Dream of the Red Chamber” was based on an eighteenth-century Chinese novel. North Korean revolutionary operas were certainly popular abroad during the 1970s and 1980s. “Sea of Blood” toured China but also the Soviet Union, Algeria, and Romania in the year after its premiere, while a second opera, “*Kkot panŭn chŏnyŏ*/The Flower Girl,” had by 1975 been performed in the Soviet Union, Algeria, and Japan (Sŏ Usŏk 1990, 195).

Revolutionary operas are most commonly associated with China rather than North Korea, and with the model works, the *yangbanxi*, promoted by Beijing from the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1967. The model works told of the Chinese Liberation Army, of the Chinese people’s struggles against class enemies, and of dismantling feudalism. Of the eight initial works, five were operas, and some were developed from existing novels, plays, and films. In North Korea, five revolutionary operas remain central to cultural production, all produced more than 40 years ago, between 1971 and 1973: “Sea of Blood” premiered in 1971, “*Tang ūi ch’amdwin ttal*/A True Daughter of the Party” first premiered in 1971 but was later reworked,<sup>16</sup> “The Flower Girl” (1972), “*Millima iyagi hara*/Oh! Tell the Forest” (1972), and “*Kŭmgangsan ūi norae*/The Song of Mount Kŭmgang” (1973). Some existed before the 1970s in different forms (Kim and Rim 1991, 11–14). Responsibility for their development was split between existing performance groups. The Pyongyang Arts Troupe (Pyongyang Yesultan) divided into two units, one to work on “Sea of Blood” and the other on “Oh! Tell” and “Mount Kŭmgang.” The Arts Troupe had initially been set up in 1947 as the North Korean Theater Troupe (Puk Chosŏn Kagŭktan). “The Flower Girl” was assigned to the Mansudae Art Troupe, organized and named by Kim Il Sung in 1969 to serve party and government functions as the successor to the Pyongyang Song and Dance Troupe (Pyongyang Kamudan), whose origins stretched back to 1946.<sup>17</sup> The Korean People’s Army Ensemble (encountered in Chapter 1) was given responsibility for “A True Daughter.”



All five North Korean revolutionary operas have, since the early 1970s, been performed multiple times, mostly in Pyongyang, and always to what is claimed to be capacity audiences. By 1986, according to the Music Yearbook (*Chosŏn ūmak ryŏn'gam* 1987, 165), they had received, in the order listed here, 1,000, 830, 560, 1,210, and 830 performances, respectively. The five, according to Kim Jong Il's 1974 treatise *On the Art of Opera*<sup>18</sup> and myriad subsequent accounts, are based on “immortal,” “epic,” or “revolutionary” stories written by or closely associated with Kim Il Sung, with three dating from the colonial period (1910–1945), one from the Korean War (1950–1953), and one spanning from the colonial period into the postwar era. The five function as ideological compendia reinforcing compliance among citizens: North Koreans are required to attend regular ideology sessions after watching an opera—or a film or a film of an opera—that supplement regular political meetings at which attendance is obligatory (Szalontai 2005, 121), and every audience member can be checked to see they have assimilated the embedded seeds and messages correctly and fully.

### “Sea of Blood”

From a historical point of view, the seven acts of “Sea of Blood” loosely span the 1930s. The revolutionary opera opens in what must be 1932, before the Minsaengdan incident, since we are told that the Korean guerrilla force has just been established. Act 4 tells us that “ten long years have passed,” giving a putative end date, although, given that the Japanese suppression of guerrilla forces lasted several years before the guerrilla remnants were forced to retreat to Soviet territory, the story must conflate allegorical and real time. It is plausible, as David-West (2006, 80–81) suggests, that Acts 2 to 7 constitute an allegorical condensation of 1937, when Kim Il Sung raided the garrison at Pochonbo.

“Sea of Blood” tells the story of Mother, a peasant woman living north of Mount Paektu in a rural village far from her hometown (see Figure 4.1). Rather than signifying a specific village, the village stands for all settlements in Manchuria where Koreans are living far from home. Mother, though, lives near the sacred mountain, feeding into the associations Mount Paektu has today for North Korean citizens (as outlined in Chapter 1). The Japanese colonialists and their Korean landowning cronies have raised taxes and rents to the point where everybody struggles to fend off starvation. In the real





**Figure 4.1** Mother, from “*P’i pada/Sea of Blood*,” as depicted at the Pyongyang Grand Theater. Photo by Keith Howard.

world, Korea had experienced a series of famines in the nineteenth century, and many Koreans moved to Manchuria to escape them.<sup>19</sup> In the opera, after night falls, the exhausted village men return from town, where they have been protesting. News comes that Japanese soldiers are rounding up and slaughtering all the men they can find to stop future protests. Soldiers capture Mother’s husband, Yunsöp, tie him to a stake, and set it alight, burning him to death. Sometime later, the bumbling village head, a collaborator with the Japanese, comes by with the garrison commander to check on a night school. North Koreans would take this as a reminder of the importance of education, because, in the real world, a literacy campaign was one of the first initiatives

of the northern regime. The campaign was needed since, in 1945, 80 percent of Koreans had not attended school, and less than 1 percent had progressed beyond six years of education (toward the end of the colonial period, the prescribed six-year curriculum was taught in schools known as *pot'ong hakkyo*) (Suzy Kim 2013, 59, 98–104<sup>20</sup>).

Back in the opera, the teacher has just enough warning to put up a picture of Japan's Mount Fuji, so the commander and village head think the class is being taught the geography of Japan, rather than the real lesson—which is about the Young Communist League. This sets up a song about how the beauty of Mount Paektu far surpasses Mount Fuji,<sup>21</sup> though of course the commander is too ignorant to realize what is so obviously true. Whenever the village head or commander appears on stage, the orchestral strings play staccato, laughing at them; this establishes a convention that will be followed in subsequent operas.

Mother's oldest son, Wönnam, is recruited to the anti-Japanese cause by the guerrilla force's propaganda officer, Cho Tongjun. Meanwhile, the bumbling village head gives the illiterate Mother a written pass to show to Japanese sentries on the road to town, only for her to be told by the propaganda officer that it actually states she should be interrogated as a likely spy. To avoid being deceived by the village head again, she asks her younger son, Ŭnam, to teach her to read. She sings a short stanza that emphasizes the importance of education. Months pass, and Mother is next encountered on a mountain path, after she has joined the guerrillas. At a crumbling mine, she witnesses a roof collapse that traps all the miners. Wives weep wildly at the death of their husbands. Mother smuggles explosives from the mine to the guerrillas, but she is captured and imprisoned by the Japanese police. Tortured, she refuses to talk: she has become a true revolutionary. In an effort to round up the guerrillas, the village head persuades the commander to release her so she can lead them to the guerrilla hideout; wounded and desperately needing treatment, she returns to her daughter, Kapsun, and young son, Ŭnam. As the troops surround them, trying to capture insurgents, Ŭnam is shot dead.

A massacre follows as the Japanese turn the village into a sea of blood. This probably references the historical Japanese massacre and oppression that followed their 1931 takeover of the Chinese territory that became Manchukuo, where, as they moved to stamp out opposition and isolate guerrillas, they slaughtered up to 250,000 ethnic Koreans, more than half the number then resident in the area.<sup>22</sup> In the opera's telling, the oppressed

villagers rise up, march on the garrison, and defeat the Japanese. Kapsun chases the escaping village head, shooting him dead. A revolutionary march is heard as the villagers celebrate, and Mother delivers a stirring speech to the assembled crowd.

Looking in greater detail, much more meaning is distilled within the opera. To show this, let me go back to the beginning. The curtain opens as an orchestra dominated by Western instruments plays a conventional overture. The camera pans to the conductor, who, in the Soviet fashion, sways on his feet, his eyes closed in contemplation, his baton sweeping the air. Although a mix of national and Western instruments would match Kim Jong Il's comments about orchestration in his *On the Art of Music* (see Chapter 2), it is thought that the orchestra for the first performance comprised only national instruments. Ch'ŏn Hyŏngshik (2012, 242) shows the opening page of a 1972 score that is only for national instruments, and Yu Youngmin (2007, 100–101), on the basis of her 2005 interviews with members of a North Korean troupe in Japan, reports this was the case. If it was the case that only national instruments were used, it is no longer so, and all the recorded versions of the opera I am aware of feature a mix of national and Western instruments. In today's filmed versions we see the title projected on the backdrop: "*P'i pada*. A revolutionary opera based on the immortal classic play written during the glorious armed struggle against Japanese imperialism."

The film credits do not explicitly state that the work is by Kim Il Sung, nor is this claimed in the libretto, nor in three volumes about revolutionary opera music (Kim Ch'ŏewŏn et al. 1985; Kim and Rim 1991; Kim Ch'ŏewŏn 1991). However, in a speech after the premiere, Kim Jong Il stated that his father had indeed written the play on which the opera was based. Subsequently, in his memoir *With the Century* (2004), Kim Il Sung claimed he was inspired to write the play when he learned of the Japanese massacre of Koreans in Manchukuo: "Dozens and even hundreds of people were massacred every day by the swords and bayonets of the punitive troops." He recalls that a partisan suggested the play should center around the figure of a woman, "who recovers from her grief over the loss of her husband and child in a sea of blood to take up the path of armed struggle." He wanted to encourage his ignorant countrymen "to become active participants in the anti-Japanese revolution," and claims this is what happened when the play was first performed in the village of Manjiang in 1936 (that is, before some of the action depicted in the opera happened).

The title fades as film of a raging fire is projected on the backdrop, an allusion likely memorializing not just 1931, but also an earlier Japanese invasion,

the 1592–1598 Hideyoshi invasion, when Korea’s southeast was burned and pillaged, causing famines that lasted several years and claimed many lives. As the fire fades, stage lights reveal an austere set, with a log cabin to the right and trees to the left, a stone wall behind surmounted by a track running off to left and right—despite frequent claims to the contrary, revolutionary opera sets are not complex. A new backdrop reveals hills in the distance, carpeted by conifers, and dark clouds drift across the sky. Claps of thunder are heard, and flashes of lightning are seen. In the yard outside the cabin, a baby, Ŭnam, cries as he is carried by his sister, Kapsun, in the standard Korean way, on her back under a quilted blanket wrapped around both. His sister soothes him, as the orchestra introduces a lilting lullaby, “*Chajangga*,” taking a preexisting song and giving it new words:

Do not cry, Ŭnam, dear,  
 You are hungry, but bear your hunger,  
 Father and mother are both hungry,  
 Do not cry, Ŭnam, dear.

Mother returns from the fields, takes the baby to her breast, and continues the song. Her vocal style is Russian coloratura, her vibrato covered using the *metallo di voce* technique, breathing from the diaphragm. Her singing contrasts with the light lyricism of the others, all of whom use what by 1971 was deemed appropriate—the *juche* voice. Mother, incidentally, is the sole central character in the opera who is not accorded a personal name. Although this matches Korean patriarchal practice,<sup>23</sup> her character echoes how Kim Il Sung’s mother, Kang Pansök, is remembered. According to the second volume of Kim’s *With the Century*, Kang was far more than a dutiful wife to Kim’s father, Kim Hyöngjik, and mother to his two sons. The official line is that in 1920 she fled to Manchuria with Kim Il Sung from their Man’gyöngdae house to Pyongyang’s west, because the colonial police had become aware of her anti-Japanese activities. She is said to have joined the guerrillas in Manchuria, although Lankov (2002) notes that the reality is not known. There was, though, a famine in Korea when she left Pyongyang, and she may have been following the well-trodden route northward. Some commentators also claim Mother’s character alludes to Kim Il Sung’s first wife, Kim Chöngsuk, although her cult, used primarily to bolster her son Kim Jong Il’s claim to the leadership of North Korea, mostly developed after “Sea of Blood” premiered.

Mother's husband, Yunsöp, enters with men from the village, lamenting how the Japanese are demanding 70 percent of all crops produced as rent. Here, I need to set the scene. Historical records do indicate that farmers often struggled because of taxes imposed by the state (by Seoul until 1910, and then by Tokyo during the colonial period), but also because elite landowners demanded at least half of each crop from tenant farmers as rent. From 1945 onward, landowners were challenged in North Korea as peasant unions spread, as these became people's committees then, as demanded by Soviet advisers, as a central peasant league was established (Armstrong 2003b, 74–86; Suzy Kim 2013, 43–47; see also Shin and Robinson 1999). Although land reform began in 1946, this imposed a controversial 25 percent tax on agricultural production, and most reform stalled during the Korean War, so it took until August 1958 for all land to be collectivized within 13,000 cooperatives (Armstrong 2014, 45, citing Lee Mun Woong 1975, 27). This would all have been fresh in the memories of audiences in the 1970s.

The libretto may also memorialize a further historical event: the Tonghak uprising of 1894. This had been caused in part by deepening economic problems and the activities of Japanese merchants. Peasants marched northward on Seoul from the southwestern Chölla Province in spring; government troops clashed with them twice but were pushed back. The king appealed to China for military assistance. China responded, but the Japanese, discerning their presence in Korea threatened, sent warships and 7,000 men. When the rebellion was quashed, Japan refused to withdraw its forces, and used them to pressure the Korean government to enact bureaucratic, legal, and financial reforms. Korea's fate began to be wrested from its hands; as "shrimps between whales," to cite an old proverb, Koreans were no longer masters of their own destiny. This was the prelude to colonialization.

In the opera, the men have been in town protesting the injustices they face:

Our stolen homeland flows with blood . . .  
 Ready to give our lives in the struggle, we rise . . .  
 Our blood boils, but we don't know how to fight.

The unsaid message is: Who can teach the people to fight? And the answer: Kim Il Sung, who would shortly take back the stolen homeland. Two men rush to the center of the stage, announcing terrible news that they relate in a series of punchy two-line strophes. All the protestors in town have been arrested, and the Japanese are searching for anyone who has escaped.

The men pledge to return to town to fight the next morning, with sickles and hoes—tools that allude to the symbolism of the Russian Revolution, but also to North Korea's promotion of agriculture. The men know that if they are to prevent their families starving they must challenge the invaders. Their singing is chopped into six short solo and small group strophes: A, A, A, B, A, A.<sup>1</sup> They neatly avoid European operatic multipart singing, where different characters would be juxtaposed in complex and dense textures, because *juche*, underpinning revolutionary operas, demands that the clarity of message given by the lyrics should always be maintained.

The men exit the stage. Mother's husband announces he must go to warn the next village and arrange for lookouts to be posted on roads. Mother anxiously watches him leave, telling him, fearfully and tearfully, to be careful. A vibraphone brightens the mood as the children roll out a mat on which they place a small table ready for supper. Mother's first son, Wönnam, asks whether there is food, but the mother can only offer small cakes made from millet; she has nothing more. Her daughter surreptitiously sets aside a small amount of her own portion. As the family acts out the scene, an offstage female chorus in identical gray dresses sings a two-part melody, a *pangchiang*.<sup>24</sup>

A mother's heart, before the heart of anybody else,  
Is broken when there is no food for her children.  
But, as she serves a meagre bowl of millet cake,  
She smiles as her eyes fill with tears.

The daughter puts some of the millet cake aside,  
Keeping it for her mother.  
Their bowls are empty, because they are poor,  
But her heart is tender and loving.

The two choral parts split to a dissonant chord held with a pause in the third line of each stanza. This serves to emphasize the family's poverty: they are hungry, with only a small amount of millet. In traditional Korea, eating grains other than rice was a mark of poverty,<sup>25</sup> and millet was typically used for distilling alcoholic spirits such as Pyongyang's *munbaeju*, rather than being consumed as food.

An owl calls out, and the son asks why. Mother replies, telling how a mother died, leaving nine children to fend for themselves. Nine would be an unheard of number of chicks for a large predatory bird such as an owl,

where three or four would be a typical brood, but Pyongyang audiences in the 1970s were, in this reply, subtly reminded of the northern state's beneficence, where its public distribution system provided everything that citizens needed.<sup>26</sup> The daughter asks why her father leaves them each night, the son comments that a friend's father has been taken by the Japanese, and Mother asks what they would do if they did not have a father. Hidden in her question is a simple message: the country needs a father, and, since 1945, Kim Il Sung has assumed this role for everybody in North Korea. How could the country cope without him? The orchestra starts up, fearfully, with urgent leaping strings. The son, then the daughter, then the offstage chorus sing, reminding the audience that nobody can survive without Kim leading them forward:

Mother, we cannot live. Mother,  
Without father, we cannot live.  
Night advances, and the sky is brightly lit by stars.  
Will father stay out all night?

The last line above alludes to Kim as a guerrilla fighter. He spent the colonial period, from the age of eight when his mother fled Pyongyang with him, away from his home. He was destined to return only after liberation from the Japanese. Although the name "Kim Il Sung" appears in Japanese sources during the 1920s, this may have been a mythical foe. Suh Dae Sook (1967, 260) states the name originally belonged to another guerrilla who died, but if it was the Kim Il Sung we know, born Kim Sŏngju in 1912, he was a truly remarkable child, leading guerrilla fighters as a teenager. By the 1930s, his activities in Manchuria do begin to be documented, although a recently discovered Soviet file about him from 1941 examined by Tertitski and Tertitskiy (2019) suggests he was a minor guerrilla leader. Still, the official version of history has Kim fighting tirelessly nearby, and the opera now adds an allusion to Moranbong (Peony Peak), the hill in Pyongyang at the foot of which Kim gave his first speech on his return to the country in September 1945,<sup>27</sup> as the offstage chorus continues:

The moon shines brightly over the hill:  
Why, father, have you not come home to me?

Mother cries as Kapsun hands her the portion of millet cake she has saved. As the children retire to bed, a lone *chŏdae* flute sounds out, joined by an accompanying *kayagŭm* zither. The Western instrumental forces pause,



illustrating how Western and national instruments are divided in the orchestra. Mother sings a folk song set to the *t'aryŏng* rhythmic cycle made popular in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century folk songs, albeit with lyrics distant from any traditional song:

How many nights have I spent in tears  
 Since I arrived in this alien place  
 Having left my land behind?  
 Far from my hometown in this alien place  
 My heart is tormented by this hard life:  
 Don't cry, owl, please don't cry!

“Alien” is one of a set of words used in “Sea of Blood” to evoke displacement and loss (others include “bleak” and “remote”). These resonate with the biblical yearning for a Messianic redeemer, and, of course, in the North Korean context, that redeemer was Kim Il Sung. The libretto at this point also mentions Mount Paektu, for which “alien” indicates the Chinese (Manchurian) side, reminding audiences of guerrilla camps that were supposedly based on the mountain, commanded by Kim.<sup>28</sup> The notion of displacement does not, however, only refer to Kim, because, after the 1860s and 1870s migrations to Manchuria, the twentieth century had opened with a further wave in the wake of the suppression of the *ūibyŏng* (righteous armies), groups who fought against the gradual takeover of Korea by Japan (as discussed in Schmid 2002, 44–47). Then, in the 1930s, Japan resettled many Koreans in its new Manchurian territory to populate industrial plants and develop mining and agriculture. The Korean population in Manchuria peaked at 2,163,115 in 1945 (Moore 2013, 176–86).<sup>29</sup>

The opera continues, the offstage chorus singing as if they are Kim Il Sung's mother:

How many years ago did I leave home,  
 In the bleak winter in my threadbare clothes!  
 I wished for my children to have a better world,  
 But the nights grow ever darker.

The mention of darkness at this point demands attention. Revolutionary operas are characteristically dark, but shift from the gray of oppression to the light and brightness of the socialist utopia as they approach their finales. “Sea of Blood” remains gray and dark until the end of Act 5, when the backdrop



changes to a golden dawn, projecting images of fields full of bountiful crops about to be harvested. At that point, the offstage chorus sings:

Along the thorny path of hardship and sorrow,  
My red spirit keeps me strong;  
I will always be true to the idea and the struggle,  
To the revolution I belong . . .  
Above the distant scattering clouds  
A soft dawn glows.

Long before that, back in Act 1, Mother's husband, Yunsöp, returns. He asks why she is up so late, and tells her that their situation is critical. She asks why the Japanese invaded Korea. Taking the frame of a folk song accompanied by national instruments, he replies:

Korea's clear rivers and graceful hills  
Have from time immemorial painted a golden tapestry.<sup>30</sup>

The accursed Japanese invaded our land  
To seize the precious 3,000-*ri* country.<sup>31</sup>

All 20,000,000 Koreans must rise up in the struggle  
And fight, even at the cost of their lives.

Folk songs are used in revolutionary operas to conjure images of Korea. The reference here to 20,000,000 is to the total Korean population during the 1930s, which hovered between 20,000,000 and 23,000,000. In 1971, when "Sea of Blood" premiered, the North Korean population stood at 14,500,000; South Korea was more densely populated.

Mother tells Yunsöp that their children cry when he is away from home. Rather than replying, he asks what she would do if he didn't return—to a Pyongyang audience, the question is, again, how they would survive without Kim Il Sung. Mother answers in song:

Without you I could not live in this bleak land,  
Where the icy winds of winter blow.  
With you we can withstand adversity,  
We will stay with you, wherever you choose to go.

That is, “we will stay with Kim Il Sung.” Yunsöp responds:

How many are the tears we have shed,  
Toiling for landlords, generation after generation.  
Even in this remote place beyond the Ch’önnam Pass  
We are still under the yoke of slavery to the Japanese.

And, together they conclude,

Whatever storms afflict this land,  
We will survive through being together.

Together—that is, North Korea’s people, the party, and the leader, united as one.

Looking back, the Chosön dynasty (1392–1910) maintained a strict hierarchical system, established on neo-Confucian principles and effectively limiting the aristocratic elite while establishing blocks to prevent commoners moving upward. These lyrics indicate that North Korean ideology rejects the notion that any change occurred before 1945. However, tentative steps at dismantling the system had been taken in the Japanese-influenced *kabo* reforms of the 1890s. Then, although colonialism meant commoners only slowly saw improvements in their access to education (literacy was the standard way to improve one’s lot in life), and to the disentangling of oppressive landlord-tenant relationships, change did occur as modernization, particularly with the rise in commerce and industry, bedded in.<sup>32</sup> In “Sea of Blood,” a cock crows, announcing dawn. . . . And so, the revolutionary opera continues in much the same way.

The premiere of this, the first North Korean revolutionary opera, was memorialized in a congratulatory speech that Kim Jong Il gave to the assembled cast and crew after the curtain fell and applause died down.<sup>33</sup> While not included in the available film and audio versions, his speech underlined that “Sea of Blood” would be the model for future productions, and he gave a basic framework for talking about it that would be studiously maintained by later commentators. Consider the following quotes from his speech:

We emerged as honorable victors in adapting the immortal classic “The Sea of Blood” into a revolutionary opera. . . . The Great Leader was very satisfied; he said that a *juche*-oriented, revolutionary opera of our own style had been created, an opera which perfectly combined ideological and artistic

qualities. He was very appreciative of the fact that recitatives had been eliminated, the lyrics had been divided into stanzas, the [offstage chorus] and dance had been introduced into the opera and the scenes had been made to flow in a three-dimensional way. He said all this meant that an end had been put to the old pattern of conventional operas and that an original, unique way of operatic interpretation had been created . . .

This opera reaches a high standard unsurpassed by any other work of stage art in depth of ideological content and intensity of artistic interpretation. . . . [It] marks the beginning of the revolution in world opera and ushers in a new era of operatic art. . . . A classic model of opera for our times has been created. . . . We have humbled those who believed they monopolized the medium of opera.

### **“A True Daughter of the Party”**

“Sea of Blood” was not an easy act to follow. Concurrently, though, a second revolutionary opera, “A True Daughter of the Party,” was being prepared by the Korean People’s Army Ensemble. This tells the story of a nurse, Kang Yönok, serving in a field hospital for injured soldiers during the Korean War in the Taebaek mountain range; the range runs north to south, forming the backbone of the peninsula. She sings in a much more lyrical way than does Mother in “Sea of Blood,” and uses aspects of deportment associated with the *juche* voice, notably rigid body postures and the almost *sprechstimme* delivery of text. The opera has a large male offstage chorus, supplemented, but in a subservient role, by a female chorus; the dominance of the male chorus has subsequently remained characteristic of the Ensemble, particularly after the *son’gun* military-first policy was announced as Kim Jong Il maneuvered himself into power in the mid-1990s. Essentially, the male chorus continues the Soviet propensity for deep, booming vocalization, while the favored orchestral textures are almost Tchaikovskian,<sup>34</sup> featuring surging Western strings and marching brass. The omission of national instruments is striking, given the statements by Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il about their importance (as cited in Chapters 2 and 3). But, the junior Kim, in a speech delivered straight after the premiere, cleverly squared matters:

The orchestral music is good. The music in the style of a [Korean] ballad is well played on Western instruments, which shows that we are quite able

to perform on Western instruments in such a way that it accords with our people's feelings and emotions. [To] have subordinated Western musical instruments to national music is a great success.<sup>35</sup>

Dramatic acting is mixed with ballet, notably in an opening battle sequence, and realism gives way to large-scale dance, particularly in an update to the earlier twentieth-century fan dance in which props that were previously fans become lotus blossoms, complemented by flowing sashes taken from a second dance, the once-exorcistic North Chŏlla Province-originating "*Salp'uri*."<sup>36</sup>

"True Daughter" maintains its dark, ominous depiction of battle and death through to the end of its fifth act. Then, as with "Sea of Blood," brightness and light floods the stage as the nurse receives a letter from her lover, who has been fighting at the front. He is alive and will return! At the beginning of Act 6, the lover becomes Kim Il Sung, who from the ashes of destruction has rebuilt Pyongyang. The city is seen through a gauze screen framed by bright blooming flowers placed over the front of the stage. A resonant vibraphone sets the mood.<sup>37</sup> This is the future, but before Pyongyang can be rebuilt there must be a final battle. The battle duly breaks out. The exhausted nurse struggles as she carries an injured patient to safety, dropping him to the floor as an incoming shell approaches, lying over him to protect him. She is hit by shrapnel and dies.

"A True Daughter" premiered on October 28, 1971. In terms of propaganda, it spoke to people's memories of the war, and to what had become its official history. Hence, South Korean soldiers are depicted as American lackeys and Americans soldiers as ruthless killers. Constant American bombardment has left massive devastation. South Korean citizens are brothers enslaved by a puppet regime, and when the heroine asks who can join the revolutionary party, the unstated answer is all, North and South Koreans together. However, Kim Jong Il was critical in his speech:

This opera does not have a plot-line of reverence for the Great Leader . . . you should include an extra scene in which the heroine shows her veneration for the General [Kim Il Sung], and ensure that it is high in artistic value. What I recommend is for the heroine to reach the deserted ward, having braved every manner of hardship, only to find dark rocks; for the [offstage chorus] to express the dramatic situation; and for the heroine to

show her irritation in a song, then utter, longing for the General, "Where is the General now?" . . . I myself will try to write the lyrics for the heroine's song of reverence for the General . . .

There can be no ideological quality or artistic value in works of art and literature that are not a part of real life. However, this opera contains many instances of the lives of characters not being depicted truthfully . . .

In operas . . . the songs should be good. . . . If you are to write good songs you should first poeticize their lyrics. . . . However, this opera includes many songs whose words have not been poeticized and . . . there has been a failure to eliminate elements of recitative . . .

You should not artificially include in operas dances which bear no relation to the flow of the plot . . .

The last of these comments appears to be a criticism of ballet, a dance form introduced by Soviet advisors that also featured in a number of Chinese revolutionary works. Although ballet retains a central place in Moscow and a lesser place in Beijing, it had little success in North Korea, where the emphasis, because of *juche*, was on national dance—whether folkloric or twentieth-century developments. Kim, bluntly, in this one sentence, stopped the use of ballet, and later North Korean texts are silent about the form; this silence is maintained by some South Korean commentators (e.g., Kim Ch'aehyön 1990).

### **"The Flower Girl"**

"Sea of Blood" had begun as a movie. It cemented Kim Jong Il's takeover of film production, although the director was listed as the Russian-speaking and Soviet-leaning Ch'oe Ikkyu.<sup>38</sup> For "The Flower Girl" (Figure 4.2), Kim again adopted a hands-on approach, unlike, but perhaps because of, his criticism of the first version of "A True Daughter." His influence is apparent in the production process, where he transferred what he had already achieved with film to the stage:

The unremitting application which he brought to his task can be shown by the following figures: he listened to over 50 songs on nine occasions before selecting the song of the village youths in Act 1; as many as 90 songs on seven occasions before selecting one for a duet in Act 2; and over 100



Figure 4.2 Kkotpun, from “*Kkot p’anŭn yŏja*/The Flower Girl” libretto booklet.

songs on six occasions for the duet between the mothers of [Poktol] and [Ch’ilsŏng] in Act 3. (Ch’oe Insu 1983, 2, 89–90)

Such were Kim’s reputed musical skills that Shin Sangok, the South Korean film director kidnapped and taken to North Korea, wrote in his memoir that Kim was able to pinpoint a single out-of-tune instrument in an orchestra (2001, 288). The quotation cited above gives a context for Kim’s offer to write a song for “A True Daughter,” but also reveals what had become the *juche*-conforming composition process, where those responsible for composing lyrics and music would write individually, with the lyricists

completing their work before the music composers began. Only later would the collective group assess what had been produced and determine what to submit for inclusion in the final version: “You should see to it that all composers write a song each, and choose the best,” Kim told his officials as he critiqued “A True Daughter.” Not dissimilarly, Soviet composers under Stalin had concentrated on self-assessment, as illustrated in a 1931 short account by Davidenko about how he developed his song “*Nas pobit’, pobit’ khoteli*/They Wanted to Beat Us:” the composer thought about each repeated tone, each rising or falling phrase, and tried out many alternatives before settling on a final version to put forward for inspection (translated in Frolova-Walker and Walker 2012, 310–13). In North Korea, we can also assume that, as under Stalin, “fear-driven self-censorship . . . made artists commit their work to oblivion before it was ever submitted to a censor or audience” (Eaton 2002, xxi).<sup>39</sup>

“The Flower Girl” was both an opera and a film, and both versions premiered in 1972. Sŏng Tongch’un was the sole composer credited for the film, along with three female singers, Ryu Yŏngok (b. 1942), Ch’oe Kŭmhŭi (b. 1943), and Ch’oe Samsuk (b. 1951), and he also oversaw the opera’s music. After the error of not maintaining oversight for “A True Daughter,” Kim Jong Il was keen to use his involvement to polish his reputation. The film is more lavish than “Sea of Blood:” it is in color and has much higher production values. Indeed, attention to detail brought success, and it won a prize at the 1972 Karlovy Vary film festival in Czechoslovakia. Again, the opera version is much more lavish than “Sea of Blood:” backdrops regularly change, and the music is almost Mussorgskian in texture, richly evoking the Russian nationalist style. The film’s heroine, Hong Yŏnghŭi, became the greatest star of North Korean cinema, while the opera’s heroine, Ch’oe Haeok, to that point reputed to have been a poor farmer’s daughter, was appointed a people’s actor (Ch’oe, in *Chosŏn yesul* 1989/11, 41–43; Fischer 2015, 61). Between them, the two stars graced the covers of journals, were featured on a bank bill and, most significantly, are to this day depicted on a mural at the entrance to the Pyongyang Grand Theater.<sup>40</sup>

One major difference between the film and the opera occurs in the prologue. The film opens with what became an iconic image of a mountain pasture carpeted by purple azaleas. The heroine walks along a narrow trail, pausing to pick the best blooms to sell. Sweeping orchestral lines complement the visual images, playing the beginning of a melody, without lyrics,

$\text{♩} = 82$

*mp* Hae - ma - da pom-i o - myŏn san'gwa tŭr - e - nŭn, A-rŭm-da - un

*mf* kkot - tŭr - i p'i - yŏ-nagŏn - man. Nara il - go pom do ŏm - nŭn u-ri dŭr - e - gen,

Ŏn - je ka - myŏn ka-sŭm sog - e kkos - i p'i - ryŏ - na.

**Notation 4.1** “*Haemada pomi onda*/Spring Comes Every Year,” *pangch'ang* offstage chorus in “*Kkot p'anŭn yŏja*/The Flower Girl” (1972).

Source: *Chosŏn ŭmak chŏnjip* 3 (1983: 100).

that became the most famous of all *pangch'ang* offstage choruses, “*Haemada pomi omyŏn*/Spring Comes Every Year” (Notation 4.1):

On the hills and in the fields,  
Fair flowers blossom every spring.  
But when will blossom fill our hearts,  
Hearts robbed of our homeland and of spring.

In the film, the melody is announced slowly but briefly, soon shifting to a variant, and we have to wait until the final scenes before we hear the familiar lyrics. But an opera stage struggles to reproduce the panorama available to film, so the curtain opens to the heroine walking among a small bed of artificial azaleas as an offstage chorus sings the famous chorus. The heroine, Kkotpun (Flower Girl), takes over for the second stanza:

Although flowers bloom in hill and field,  
My heart is filled with grief and fears.  
However fair the flowers are,  
The dewdrops on them are my tears.

It is tempting to compare these lyrics to Kim Min'gi's (b. 1951) acoustic guitar (*tong kit'a*) song, “*Ach'im isul*/Morning Dew,” an anthem of the student



democracy movement in South Korea that was first performed in 1970, which quickly traveled from Seoul to Pyongyang.<sup>41</sup> This same song is also echoed in the third stanza, sung by the offstage chorus as the heroine bends to pick flowers:

The sad-eyed girl sells pretty flowers  
Through which a tale of woe is told.  
The flowers, moist with tears of dew,  
The secrets of her heart unfold.

Look and listen to this tearful story,  
Why does this young girl sell her flowers?

Given the lush scene-painting, it is unfortunate that the melody, and the melody that the film score shifts to, bears an uncanny but hopefully coincidental resemblance to a well-known nineteenth-century American song, “Oh My Darling, Clementine.”

Both film and opera share a single story that, together with its first claimed staging in 1930, is credited to Kim Il Sung in both the film’s credits and the opera’s libretto. It is a story centered not around Japanese oppression but about the feudalism of premodern Korea that had continued into colonial times. The heroine, Kkotpun, who like Mother in “Sea of Blood” has no given name, is a beautiful young girl. She displays true filial piety. She sells flowers picked on the mountainside to pay for medicine for her sick mother. As both film and opera begin, we are introduced to the terrible situation of her family—the music is in a dark minor key, with two Korean *chōdae* flutes sorrowfully intoning above the trembling orchestra. We hear how her father fell into debt over a loan of two sacks of millet, and how the tyrannical landowner, Pae, forced him into bonded labor. But the father died before he could repay the loan. The family situation is contextualized by a male offstage chorus, interpreting this kind of indebtedness as something typical of the Korean countryside in the dark days of colonialism:

We plough the land and shed tears of blood,  
Yet remain forever deep in debt . . .

Great wrongs and great injustices are what we know,  
What can we do without land of our own?

The echoes of “Sea of Blood” are unmissable.

Kkotpun's brother, Chöryöng, takes over responsibility for the debt, working for eight years until he delivers what should be the final repayment—a sack of rice which, since rice is twice as valuable as millet, is worth as much as the original debt. The orchestra briefly moves to a waltz, still keeping to a minor key. The landlord and his agent, Paek, discuss, against laughing staccato strings, how much extra interest they can charge so that the debt will never be fully repaid, in order that they can continue to demand bonded labor from the family. Mother and Chöryöng muse, ignorant of Paek's evil intention: “Though ragged and hungry, if we live together we shall know joy in our humble home.” Mother pauses on “live together” to emphasize the familiar message that Koreans now joyfully live together in Kim Il Sung's embrace.

The music then shifts to a major key. This should be the happy day when the family will be freed, but ominous sounds from double basses doubled with *chö haegüm* fiddles and the reformed national *tae p'iri* oboe suggest otherwise, taking us to “Bidlo” in Mussorgsky's “Pictures at an Exhibition.” Packaged carefully in a box, precious wild ginseng (*insam*) arrives for the landlord: it is medicine to ensure long life. The orchestra returns to pizzicato strings, much as with depictions of the village leader and Japanese commander in “Sea of Blood.” The landlord, his wife, and his faithful agent celebrate acquiring this wonderful treasure. The wild ginseng cost ten sacks of rice, ten times the family's original debt. The wife begins to heat a boiling broth in a brazier, placing the ginseng in it; a lilting *chödae* flute paints the scene. Kkotpun's younger sister, Sönhüi, watches as the landlord's wife takes a jujube to chew on from the verandah. Sönhüi furtively picks one for herself, but the wife sees her, berates her, and pushes her to the ground. As she falls, she strikes the brazier, and the broth spills, scalding her face and blinding her. Chöryöng remonstrates, and as he fights the landlord, he sets fire to the house. He is thrown into prison. Grief ensues, marked by a full offstage chorus repeatedly chanting, “Ah!” By this point, then, the men of the family have been dispatched, but we are left with a parallel commentary in which the brother represents Kim Il Sung, much as the husband did in “Sea of Blood.” First, from a melodramatic male offstage chorus:

Our dear brother has been arrested,  
And the landlord's house set ablaze.  
As the youth is led away,  
The earth and heaven cry aloud!

To hammer home the point, Kkotpun and Mother exchange verses in which we hear that Chŏryŏng's (or, rather, Kim Il Sung's) eventual return will bring their salvation:

The moment he completed his bonded labor  
He was jailed: fate is so unkind!  
How can I live with my husband dead,  
My son taken away and my daughter blind?

He said he'd be with us but where has he gone,  
Even before he could return home?

The chorus chants:

Into despair his mother is thrown,  
How will she now live, on her own?

The story continues to unfold until the end of Act 5. Kkotpun's mother takes on the debt, working, in the time it takes for the offstage chorus to sing four lines, for six years. Snow falls, but, projected onto a gauze screen brought down over the front of the stage, it cannot settle on anybody on stage. Would this simple stage deceit not, I wonder, have angered Kim Jong Il, given the oft-repeated story of how, at the age of seven, he critiqued the 1949 film "My Hometown" for using cotton wool to represent snowflakes?<sup>42</sup> Chŏryŏng has not returned, and Sŏnhŭi sings a strophe that develops the Chŏryŏng/Kim Il Sung parallelism.

Six years ago, with our dear brother,  
My sister and I planted this flowering tree.  
The tree has grown taller than me,  
But my dear brother has still not come home.

A second strophe is offered by the offstage chorus. Then a third is shared by Sŏnhŭi and Kkotpun:

Longing to see our dear brother,  
We have tended the tree with pure devotion.  
Far, far away behind iron bars,  
We are sure that he thinks about us all.

The mother falls ill. Act 2 begins with solo arpeggios on the *ongnyugŭm*, the new harp zither that replaced the attempt to use reformed ancient harps in “Sea of Blood.” The *ongnyugŭm* is backed by the full orchestra. An offstage chorus offers a descending descant for the first two melody lines, creating pathos but clouding the texture. A vibraphone accompanies villagers as they go off to work in the fields, and Sŏnhŭi feels her way to the flowering tree she planted with her brother. It is a Rose of Sharon (*mugunghwa*) which, in the real world, is South Korea’s national flower, while North Korea once used the magnolia (however, in the years after “The Flower Girl” premiered, orchids known as *kimilsungia* and *kimjongilia* were propagated that, because of the family leadership cult, would today be given prominence).

Back in the opera and film, with the mother unable to work, Kkotpun takes over the debt. In the sparse few hours she has off from the daily grueling labor, she sells flowers to pay for her mother’s medicine. The debt is now impossible for her ever to repay. From an initial five *wŏn*, the landlord expects 40 *wŏn* interest, plus the broken brazier at three *wŏn* and 15 *chŏn*, plus interest, plus eight *wŏn* and 80 *chŏn* for oil, before interest payments, plus food given to the family during their working days through all the years, and 100 *wŏn* for the ginseng destroyed when Sŏnhŭi knocked the brazier over. Today, these may seem insignificant amounts, given that in North Korea the official exchange rate at the time of writing (2018) hovers around 900 *wŏn* to US\$1, but a set of stamps issued to celebrate revolutionary operas in 1974 (Figure 4.3), with values of 2, 5, 10, and 40 *chŏn*—100 *chŏn* equal 1 *wŏn*—indicates that they were not insignificant when “The Flower Girl” premiered.

In the story, Kkotpun is joined at the market by her blind sister, and they discover they can earn more if they sing together. Their mother stops them, pointing out that accepting money for such a low-class activity as singing is little more than prostitution. The landlord, however, finds Kkotpun selling flowers when she should be toiling for him, and decides she is worthless as a worker so prepares to sell her as a slave. Then the mother dies. Kkotpun runs away, determined to find her brother to tell him the sad news. She travels the country, but when she arrives at the jail she is told Chŏryŏng has already died. With much melodramatic acting, she begins the long tramp home, distressed and hungry, vowing to take care of her blind sister. Two aspects of the story call for our attention here. First, into the twentieth century, the association between women entertainers and prostitutes was strong. The *kisaeng* courtesan tradition embraced some who belonged to the Department of the Royal Household (Kungnaebu), but also three ranks



Figure 4.3 Stamps celebrating “*Kkot p'anŭn yŏja*/The Flower Girl,” issued in 1974. From the author’s collection.

outside the court, with celebrated musicians and dancers at the top, and those little more than prostitutes at the bottom.<sup>43</sup> Pyongyang had long been a center for courtesans, and Kaesŏng, today on the northern side near the border separating the two states, was once home to a particularly famous courtesan, Hwang Chini (1506–1560), who is still celebrated at a waterfall near the town where she reputedly wrote a well-known song. Beginning in Seoul in 1909, courtesans began to form societies, *chohap*, and from 1917, under Japanese control, they were organized around institutes, *kwŏnbŏn*, much on the Japanese *geisha/kaburenjo* model. Catalogues were printed detailing their skills, one of which, from 1918, was republished in Seoul in 1984 in photocopied form: *Chosŏn miin pogam* (Handbook of Korean Beautiful Women).<sup>44</sup> Second, slavery was, in broad terms, practiced until the Japanese-influenced *kabo* reforms of the 1890s. However, the issue of comfort women (*wianbu*, *chŏngshindae*), women forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese military during the Pacific War (for which, see Howard 1995), along with the indentured labor that many Koreans faced during the colonial period, gives salience to the claim that Japan treated Koreans as little more than slaves.<sup>45</sup>

Back with the story, at the beginning of Act 6, Kkotpun reaches the entrance to her home village. The association with home, the *kohyang*, is strong in both Koreas, much as it is in Japan (as *furusato*, "old village"<sup>46</sup>): it is where parents live, near family lands (or tenanted fields) and ancestral graves, and the place where one should feel most at ease. It is also, of course, the subject of the important 1949 film "My Hometown." However, Kkotpun knows the landlord will send her to prison for deserting her work, so she hesitates before entering the village. Meanwhile, the landlord's wife has taken sick, and a shaman is holding a ritual. Before Kkotpun arrives, the wife, in her delirious state, has a dream in which she foresees Kkotpun stealthily creeping into the village to rescue her blind sister. Previously, in Act 2, a table for an ancestral rite was set up on stage, which the mother spoiled when she tripped in the yard as she struggled to carry a huge bowl of flour for the landlord. He kicked her for being clumsy, but his superstition starkly contrasted with the poor mother, who would not be long for this world unless she could get proper medicine. The lesson is clear: superstition, in shamanist form, is something from the feudal past that never helped anybody, and which will not be tolerated in the modernized North Korea.<sup>47</sup> But the landlord is stuck in his premodern world and believes his wife's dream. He instructs his agent to get rid of Sönhüi, and the agent tricks her to accompany him to the mountains. The mountains, though, are full of revolutionary guerrillas, and she escapes. In this telling, the guerrillas are all around, close by, and certainly not cowed by Japanese oppression. Sönhüi is sheltered in the log cabin of an old man; the audience, at this point, will associate the cabin with those on Mount Paektu that today memorialize the claimed guerrilla camps of Kim Il Sung. The guerrillas are led by Chöryöng (or is it Kim Il Sung?), who did not die in prison, but escaped and joined them. After an operatic trio of Chöryöng, his comrade, and the old man, sung with the three lines opposing each other in the supposedly abandoned operatic multipart tradition, Chöryöng is reunited with Sönhüi. Meanwhile, Kkotpun has returned to her family's empty, wrecked hovel in the village, and realizes her sister has been taken away by force. Desperate to be reunited, she knocks on the landlord's gate. A fight ensues in which she throws scolding hot soup at the landlord and his wife. She is overpowered and locked in the servant's quarters. Orchestral textures give way to a simple folk song accompanied by two national instruments, the *p'iri* oboe and *ongnyugüm* harp zither, as the landlord dances to celebrate her capture. At this point, with just 15 minutes of the three-hour duration to go, but much as in the first two revolutionary operas,

gray gives way to vibrant light. Chŏryŏng, to the sound of a march, leads his guerrillas, along with villagers, to take revenge on the evil landlord. Kkotpun is released and reunited with her siblings.

A finale opens with an adapted fan dance. Each dancer holds a bunch of azaleas rather than fans, and shuffles on stage in the traditional way, but with one arm outstretched as if holding out the long sleeves of an itinerant monk or young indigent from a mask dance of old. A screen painted with trellises drops over the front of the stage to frame the action, as the offstage chorus bursts into the famous *pangchang*, joined by Kkotpun and her siblings. On the backdrop, a red sun rises, and all the company bows to it, the three heroes walking to it as the curtain falls. As already noted, state ideology makes Kim Il Sung the sun, the bringer of life, warmth, and abundant harvests. The film, meanwhile, closes with Kkotpun walking the streets of the town, smiling, holding her basket of flowers, to the same *pangchang*. The camera zooms in on her basket, and it is full of red flowers—red, the color of the revolution. The picture fades to black.

### **“Oh! Tell the Forest” and “The Song of Mount Kŭmgang”**

The fourth and fifth revolutionary operas premiered in 1972 and 1973, respectively. “Oh! Tell” moves to the last years of the Japanese occupation. There are spies about, Koreans who have been turned by the Japanese. In the real world, this was the case by the late 1930s, since the Japanese achieved some success in infiltrating guerrilla groups. But there was a contemporary salience for audiences in the 1970s, when South Korean spies were said to be operating among the faithful citizens of North Korea, and citizens were regularly reminded that nobody should be trusted. In “Oh! Tell,” Ch’oe Pyŏnghun takes on secret political work for the revolution while working under the colonial masters as an apparently dutiful village leader. He lives near the northern border. The people swear and spit at him when he forces them to build a barracks for Japanese troops. They scornfully call him a lackey of the enemy. His mother-in-law spits in his face. His daughter attempts suicide, jumping into a lake, but, thankfully, she is rescued. Ch’oe suffers mental torture as he tries to keep his true politics hidden, only for his daughter to finally discover a watch that Kim Il Sung has secretly given him, which she realizes makes him, in reality, an ardent supporter of the revolution.



“Mount Kūmgang” tells about the family of Hwang Songmin, which is split apart and rendered penniless by the cruel Japanese. The husband is taken away and never returns home. After liberation, mother and daughter live in the paradise of North Korea, abundantly fed and housed, witnessing the miraculous transformation of their hometown under the socialist revolution. They live in the foothills of North Korea’s most scenic place, Mount Kūmgang (Diamond Mountain), once a place of pilgrimage visited by virtually every artist and hence depicted in myriad landscape paintings,<sup>48</sup> today situated just north of the dividing line between South and North Korea.<sup>49</sup> Two decades after liberation, they still long to be reunited with their father and husband, although they do not know if he is alive. They travel to Pyongyang as members of an amateur drama troupe to participate in a festival—the capital is the showcase for the country and the world, the stage for all of North Korea’s major festivals. Their participation is a great success. Most importantly, though, their father attends, and he recognizes the sound of an old family flute played by his daughter. Finally, he has news of his long-lost family! They are reunited.

As with the first three revolutionary operas, “Oh! Tell” and “Mount Kūmgang” feature twists in their final acts that turn darkness into light, and in which Kim Il Sung emerges as the leader of the revolutionary army and as the leader destined to rebuild the nation. Both, then, embrace the sameness present in the first three; ideology permeates every element. However, “Mount Kūmgang” has an additional resonance, since the issue of divided families remains painful in both Koreas, though less because of Japanese colonial policies, and more because the division in 1945 and the subsequent Korean War left many families separated. In the war, North Korean and Chinese troops marched southward and retreated northward, while South Korean and United Nations troops retreated southward and marched northward, with both sides, in the process, dispersing local populations. Koreans often say that 10,000,000 (*chōnman*; “myriad” would be an alternative translation) families were separated.<sup>50</sup> By 1973, though, it appears that some consideration was being given to expanding the ideological foundations of revolutionary operas, to move beyond the years of colonial occupation and civil war. This is one of the themes I turn to in Chapter 5.



## Contextualizing Revolutionary Operas

### Are revolutionary operas revolutionary?

“Sea of Blood” premiered some years after China’s initial eight “model works.” The Chinese works took their themes from the Communist revolutionary war experience, and five were operas, hence the sobriquet “revolutionary operas.”<sup>1</sup> Both Chinese and North Korean operas are said to reflect the ideological fervor of the populace, but at this point a distinction appears. The Chinese works were permitted and promoted by Madame Mao, Jiang Qing, but when US president Richard Nixon, during his historic visit to China in 1972, “asked Jiang the names of the writer, composer and director [of *Hongse niangzijun*/Red Detachment of Women], she gave him a benevolent look and said . . . ‘created by the masses’” (Terrill 1984, 341). In contrast, *juche* has it that the North Korean leader, in policy and action, reflects the populace, so operas must be claimed to be written by, or closely associated with, Kim Il Sung, and largely with his guerrilla activities during the 1930s. Also, they were developed as staged works in a process overseen by his son, Kim Jong Il. Pyongyang downplays potential Chinese connections, but there are close parallels. “Red Detachment,” for example, began as a film in 1961, became a ballet in 1962 associated with Zhou Enlai, and then an opera in 1964. “Sea of Blood,” meanwhile, began as a film in 1969, became an opera in 1971, and then a symphony in 1973. Both are set in the 1930s. The heroine in “Red Detachment,” Wu Qinghua, is mirrored by Mother in “Sea of Blood:” both are peasants who escape service for the local landowner. In “Red Detachment,” Wu’s male confidant is hurt in battle, taken captive, refuses to confess, and is executed. She joins the local women’s corps, as does Mother, whose husband has been captured and burnt at the stake. Mother becomes a fighter, transforms her personal vendetta into a revolutionary agenda, and leads the corps to get rid of the evil landowner. Chinese model works have little room for sentimentality, since sadness is considered an enemy of revolution. Love and dedication are reserved for Mao, hence Wu’s confidant is, unlike

Mother’s husband, not a direct relation. North Korea, however, in seeking to contain and control its population, found it useful to retain a Confucian approach to the family unit.

Another Chinese model work is “The White-Haired Girl,” which was first an opera at Yan’an, then became a film in 1950, and then a ballet in 1965. Like “The Flower Girl,” it is set in the 1930s and features a landowner, a debt, and a father killed or worked to death by the landowner’s agent. In both works, boiling liquid is poured over the face of one protagonist—the heroine in the Chinese work, and the heroine’s sister in the Korean—because of or deliberately by the landowner’s wife. A third model work, “The Red Lantern,” began as a novel in 1958 and was made into a movie in 1963. Set in 1939, it concerns the Communist underground, where Li Yuhe works at a railway station for the Japanese occupiers of Manchuria while secretly passing messages to the Communist guerrillas. Li has a premonition of being arrested, and much of the story concerns how his mother relates his activities to his daughter, Tiemei. The parallel is to “Oh! Tell.”

A fourth Chinese model work, the opera “Raid on the White Tiger Regiment,” also began as a film, but it is set during the Korean War, suggesting elements of both “A True Daughter of the Party” and a later North Korean opera that premiered in 1974, “The Fate of a Self-Defence Corps Man” [*sic.*]. “White Tiger Regiment” tells a story based on fact—the proof of which is supported by a captured American flag that was long displayed in a military museum in Beijing—to demonstrate Mao’s assertion that collaborators with the American forces were “paper tigers.” In it, Yan Weicai, leading a scout platoon of the people’s volunteers, overthrows the supposedly invincible South Korean White Tiger Regiment, which has been equipped and is being advised by Americans. And so on. Kim Jong Il made something of a habit of copying what he encountered from abroad: consider the cult film “*Pulgasari*” (1985), a “Godzilla” knock-off, or the rehashing of a Japanese film series as North Korea’s “*Minjokkwa ūnmyōng*/Nation and Destiny” (see Chapter 8).

Rather than simply document what was copied, it is worthwhile to consider what influences were absorbed. Xiaomei Chen neatly encapsulates the most significant aspect of the model works in her introduction to *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Chinese Drama*:

These model works were established as exemplary “others” with which to condemn the nearly entire repertoire created before 1966 as “unhealthy” or even “antiparty” for their feudalist, bourgeois and revisionist contents. (2014, 21–22)

Chen identifies a set of common themes: resistance against Japan, peasants fleeing tyrannical landlords, sacrifices for the war effort, underground activities, the revolutionary cause passing across generations of hardship and struggle, and martyrdom. These are all present in North Korean operas. Hence, where “The Red Lantern” links the 1930s Republic of China period with the People’s Republic of China (1948–onward), North Korean revolutionary operas reinforce the state’s constructed history, dividing Japanese colonialism (with the struggle for independence led by the legendary guerilla Kim Il Sung) from the Korean Civil War, when Kim was (in the North Korean telling) single-handedly victorious over American aggressors.<sup>2</sup> Both of these periods, then, cast in an oppressive gray light, are replaced, particularly in “Mount Kūmgang,” by Kim’s building of the socialist utopia, a utopia that destiny proclaims will come because of the people’s faithfulness. As in China (Chen 2002, 75), North Korean operas enact a past revolution but are intended to spur the populace on to continuing their revolutionary zeal into a perpetual future. Also, both North Korean and Chinese operas use mimesis to persuade, repeatedly aestheticizing slogans and ideological statements (C. *wendou*, “verbal battles”); they are the equivalent of the slogans and images highlighted by “big character posters” (after Pang 2017, 9–18).<sup>3</sup>

North Korean revolutionary operas, like their Chinese counterparts, allow women to emerge as “little heroes”—a term I borrow, after Myers (1994, 40), from the account of Soviet literature by Katerina Clark (1978).<sup>4</sup> “True Daughter” has Kang Yōnok, a nurse and supporter of the revolution. The daughter in “Oh! Tell” tries to commit suicide, believing her father is a stooge of the Japanese. “Mount Kūmgang” relates how a mother and daughter live, separated for many years from their husband and father. Mother and Kkotpun are the central characters in “Sea of Blood” and “The Flower Girl.” This is similar to the Chinese model works, where “the female is no longer a passive victim, but an active fighter . . . on equal terms with the other sex, and one who chooses to protect others rather than being protected” (Hon-Lun Yang 2013, 226; see also Roberts 2010). Laikwan Pang (2017, 107–35) explores, through the “barefoot doctor,” how the feminine trope created a character worthy of emulation (C. *mofan*), but also an embodiment of perfection (C. *yangban*). In real life, though, gender equality remained chimerical, since just as Trotsky told women they had no right to reject their responsibilities as mothers, Mao expected women to “hold up half the sky,” as both workers and mothers (the resulting double sacrifice did not go unnoticed in post-Cultural Revolution theater, as Xiaomei Chen (2002, 261–90)

shows). Kim Il Sung, in turn, talked about the duties of motherhood in terms of the responsibility to rear good revolutionaries, and it is of note that in revolutionary operas most female heroes continue to wear the restricting traditional costume, *chosŏn ot*, as if still subservient.<sup>5</sup>

In Pyongyang, promoting women as heroes served a more mundane concern than family responsibility or gender equality: the leadership cult made Kim Il Sung the father of every citizen, the ultimate “positive hero” (after Clark 1981, 46–67) who could never be challenged. Indeed, in 1992 I watched young children in Pyongyang learning to write, using the common East Asian square-boxed paper sheets for character writing (K. *wŏn’goji*) to repeatedly spell out *U-ri a-bŏ-ji, Kim-Il-sŏng* (Our fa-ther, Kim-Il-Sung). Again, in 2000, I watched kindergarten children playing at delivering post. “Whose house is this?” asked one, acting as the postal worker, to another, who answered a knock on an imaginary door. The game alerted each child to the fact they had a “little” father and mother alongside the father of the nation, Kim Il Sung, since the answer required was, of course, the head of the family, the “little” father. Amundsen’s account of the “*Arirang*” mass performance festival relates how she saw myriad young participants waving to Kim Il Sung’s image while repeatedly shouting *A-bŏ-ji!* (Father!) (2013, 164). In later years, Kim was portrayed less as the guerrilla fighter and more as a caring, loving, and benevolent figure, and to do so he took on maternal roles to become the summative family figure (Myers 2010, 73; Ryang 2012, 80–84). But in the early 1970s, when revolutionary operas were written, he was still only the nation’s patriarch, and operas needed to render lesser fathers impotent. Male characters, then, had to be subservient, not just to Kim, but to female heroes. Hence, the husband of the struggling protagonist and father to the children dies early in both “Sea of Blood” and “The Flower Girl,” and the father can’t adequately provide for his family in either “The Flower Girl” or “Oh! Tell.” At the same time, absent male characters, imprisoned or battling for freedom with families longing for their return, represent Kim in “The Flower Girl” and “True Daughter.” Operas, then, neatly embrace the leadership myth: Pyongyang emerges after being flattened in the Korean War, planned and overseen by Kim, in “True Daughter”; a family is reunited after separation due to the benevolence of Kim in “Mount Kūmgang”; and underground resistance is revealed as national struggle when a watch presented by Kim is produced by the father in “Oh! Tell.”

Revolutionary operas speak for the patricentric state. They promote Kim Il Sung while demoting anybody who might threaten his leadership. He is

revealed as the sun in both “The Flower Girl” and “Mount Kūmgang,” the guarantor of life in “True Daughter,” the source of bountiful harvests in “Oh! Tell,” and the architect of a shiny capital in both “True Daughter” and “Mount Kūmgang.” And so on. It is no coincidence that Kim Jong Il had usurped control over Pyongyang’s film studios in 1968, a few years before the first revolutionary opera premiered. One of his first projects was the film version of “Sea of Blood,” and after several decades during which cardboard acting lacking dramatic impact had persistently related “the same tedious stories of selfless factory workers and exemplary farm girls,” his approach was to drill the regime’s core principles into the populace, to make it undeniable that

Kim Il Sung was the greatest man who had ever lived; that loyalty to him and to the national “family” was a greater virtue than any other; and that the Korean people were a purer race, more virtuous and valuable, than any other. (Fischer 2015, 59)

This, in a nutshell, is the ideology of *juche*.

Much as “True Daughter” elicited criticism in its first incarnation, and apart from the success of the film of “The Flower Girl,” Kim Jong Il continued to decry the lack of good artists. The situation remained painfully apparent when in 1978 he ordered the kidnapping of Shin Sangok and Ch’oe Ŭnhŭi, the South Korean director and his actress wife.<sup>6</sup> In an infamous tape recording that they smuggled out, Kim is heard lamenting:

We send our people to East Germany to study editing, to Czechoslovakia to study camera technology, and to the Soviet Union to learn how to direct. . . . But our efforts have brought no progress. (cited in Suk-Young Kim 2010, 207)

Cultural production needed a shot of adrenaline applied to more than just film, and revolutionary operas were intended as the mechanism to revive theater and music. Kim Jong Il’s involvement came as he elevated himself to be judge and jury of all cultural production, and so, as related in Chapter 1, he critiqued those involved in music production in much the same way as he did those in film. However, in his 1975 speech about music composition, he also remarked how “in the course of the creation of revolutionary operas, the composition of songs has improved.” In other words, *his* oversight of operas was responsible for countering the decline and staleness in production. He

used this claim to bolster his credentials as the leader-in-waiting, as Shin and Ch'oe argue in respect to film (1991, 289).

Undoubtedly, China's eight model works impacted North Korea's revolutionary operas. The Korean operas emerged as China pushed to popularize (*C. puji*) its own, already existing, model works, and as it began to release filmed versions and to transplant the works among major ethnic groups, including Chinese Koreans (Clark 2008, 75; Pease 2016, 167, 173). Still, much remains distinct, and it seems that Soviet policies and practices were also considered. Introduced to Pyongyang after liberation from Japanese colonialism, the importation of Soviet ideas was strongest in the years up to 1956; that is, until the Ch'ollima campaign. This is before the development of revolutionary operas, but influence lingered. Koreans became familiar with Soviet literature through efforts to make translations available. Yi Hyönsu (2006, 89–94) convincingly details similarities between Gorky's 1907 novel “Mother” and “Sea of Blood,” observing that the film of Gorky's novel had been subtitled in Korean and shown in Pyongyang not long before the opera was developed.<sup>8</sup>

North Koreans experienced Soviet artistic culture partly through tours and exchanges, but in 1945 few within the cultural sphere had spent much time in the Soviet Union. Some would soon be sent to train in Moscow, but initially there were stronger links with China, such as through the linguist and scholar Kim Tubong (1889–1958), who served as the first chairman of the Central Committee of the North Korean Workers' Party from 1946 to 1948, and Kim Il Sung's sometime speechwriter, the politician Kim Ch'angman (1907–1966). This complicates any claim on Soviet influence, as does the fact that many more had migrated from Seoul and the South, among whom, as members of the 1948 Central Committee, were the novelist Hong Myönghui (1888–1968) and former Yönhui College (now Yonsei University, in Seoul) historian, economist, and educator Paek Namun (1894–1979); Hong was vice premier for culture, and Paek was education minister. Not surprisingly, then, and factionalism notwithstanding, North Korea proved itself unwilling to be a fully subservient partner to the Soviets in its domestic cultural development. In fact, Soviet cultural promotion was always constrained by limited manpower, with VOKS, the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, typically employing only a tiny number of cultural officers at any given time.<sup>9</sup> VOKS operated in Pyongyang through the Korean-Soviet Culture Society (*Chosso munhwa hyöphoe*), set up in November 1945 and the publisher of the journal *Chosso ch'insön* (*Korean-Soviet Friendship*). By

late 1949 the society claimed a membership of 1,300,000 and reached down to village level (Armstrong 2003a, 83). However, when the American journalist Anna Louise Strong visited North Korea in 1947, she was struck by the naive belief among those Soviets she met that they were running the show, commenting that “the only concentration of Russians was in the capital . . . and they were not very conspicuous even there” (Strong 1949, 11, cited in Suzy Kim 2013, 6).

The platform of the Federation of North Korean Literature and Art Unions (Puk Chosŏn munhwa yesulchŏng tongmaeng), formed in March 1946 and later dropping the “North” from its name, signaled a nationalist approach. It aspired to promote a socialist national culture based on progressive democracy and a large-scale education and enlightenment movement. This was also articulated in a July 1946 essay by An Mak, the Marxist husband of the important dancer, Chŏe Sŭnghŭi, and later a deputy minister, in the inaugural edition of the journal *Chosŏn munhwa* (*Korean Culture*) (Armstrong 2003b, 173; see also Yu Chaechŏn 1988, 236). Artists, An wrote, should reconstruct Korea’s “5,000-year-old national arts and culture”<sup>10</sup> in order to build a “new national self-consciousness and self-confidence.” It is hard to ignore the focus on the national and on nationalism (*minjok/minjok chuŭi*),<sup>11</sup> even if this was, superficially at least, anathematic to Marx’s belief that revolution would develop first in industrialized states and would only later break national boundaries. It is in this context that Charles Armstrong introduces the term “revolutionary nationalism” (2003b, 183)<sup>12</sup> while Alzo David-West (2007), as noted in Chapter 4, argues that *juche* is both nationalist and linked to Stalinism.<sup>13</sup>

North Korea essentially adopted parts of an earlier policy that had been applied from Moscow during the first decade of the Soviet Union, to “intellectualize the working classes and working class-ize the intellectuals” (Armstrong 2003b, 166–67, after Fitzpatrick 1979). As elsewhere, the available bourgeois artists were required to populate what Katherine Verdery refers to, in respect of Romania, as a “space of legitimation” (1991, 17). But this contained an inherent challenge to political control, and in March 1947 the Central Committee began to censor art on the grounds that it should not be about aesthetics, but should instead “educate the people in socialism and serve the nation and people” (Kwŏn Yŏngmin 1991, 59). However, where Scalapino and Lee (1972) identify conflicts between Stalinists and nationalists behind the subsequent purges, and where purges are routinely interpreted in Korean accounts as crusades for ideological purity, Tatiana Gabroussenko (2010,



167) makes the point that in 1945 there was no established Communist intellectual tradition among Korean artists.<sup>14</sup> Her argument is that during the colonial era, the Korea Artista Proleta Federacio (Chosŏn p'ŭroret'aria yesul tongmaeng, KAPF), founded in Seoul in August 1925 and dissolved in 1935, had only been loosely Marxist in its orientation, because most members came from the privileged class, and therefore lacked sympathy for the peasantry even as they naively championed them (Gabroussenko 2010, 76–79; see also Myers 1994, 19–28 and Poole 2014, 45–46). Hence, KAPF members tended to reflect social issues, and they interpreted Soviet literature, including Tolstoy and Gorky, in relation to critiques of old Korea—a Korea that had failed, since it had lost its independence and become a Japanese colony. Their commentaries primarily discussed Korea's moral degradation and backwardness.

Such a situation was not unique to Korea. But while such themes were evident among the loose cultural nationalist grouping of Korea in the 1920s, by the 1930s writers and some performers concluded that they must feed on Japanese colonialism as much as reject it. So, and as my introduction to this volume briefly argued, in the final years of colonialism, writers (and, by extension, all artists, including musicians and dancers) entered a dark period when it was as if they were in “a black hole, where conventional notions of time, and perhaps also responsibility, disappeared” (Poole 2014, 4).<sup>15</sup> Intellectuals were only too aware that liberation came unexpectedly, as the activist Ham Sŏkhŏn put it, as a thief in the night. The result was that writers and artists in the new North Korea needed a crash course of learning from Moscow. What was learned, however, was balanced not just by nationalism, but also by the factional allegiances of those involved, and factions were arguably more apparent in Pyongyang than in Moscow, because while Stalin took a hands-on, if at times boorish, approach in his criticism of literature and art, Kim Il Sung, rather than having any depth of knowledge, made “folksy pronouncements” (Myers 1994, 152). Although a former Methodist clergyman in Jilin, Sŏn Chŏngdo, is cited by Bradley Martin as recalling that Kim played the chapel harmonium “very well” (2004, 26), Suk-Young Kim maintains that Kim could show “no concrete evidence of his artistic expertise or creative activities” (2010, 139). As a consequence, Kim needed scriptwriters. He needed critics to emerge from among the writers and artists, and initially some did take on this role, at least until *juche* ideology standardized cultural production.



### Guided by the leaders

In 1946 Kim Il Sung gave two speeches that echoed the platform of the new Literature and Arts Foundation, but which also initiated far-reaching policies. The first was given to propagandists and culture workers on May 24, and the second, on August 8, to musicians on the occasion of a performance that celebrated the founding of the Central Symphony Orchestra.<sup>16</sup> In both speeches he stated that North Korea had its own culture, yet he mirrored Mao Zedong's talks at the 1942 Yan'an forum. Hence, where Mao had it that "victory over the enemy depends primarily on armies with guns in their hands, but . . . we still need a cultural army, since this kind of army is indispensable in . . . winning victory" (trans. McDougall 1980, 57<sup>17</sup>), Kim called artists "combatants on the cultural front," "ardent patriots," and "soldiers fighting with art as a weapon for the building of a new, democratic Korea." "Music," Kim said, "should be developed in keeping with the requirements of the revolution, preserving the national characteristics." His speechwriter at the time, Kim Ch'angman, tended to take his lead from Mao, and to an extent this remained the case in 1951, when Kim gave a speech on June 30, "On some questions arising in our literature and art":<sup>18</sup>

Our writers and artists, as engineers of the human soul, should vividly represent in their works the lofty patriotism and staunch fighting spirit of our people and their unshakable conviction of final victory, and should see that their works serve our fighting people as a powerful weapon and as a great inspiration . . .

Our writers and artists have failed to represent the noble ideas and sentiments of the people and their life. . . . Their creative activities have lost touch with life and are lagging behind our rapidly advancing reality . . . [they] have failed to give a vivid portrayal, on a high level of presentation and artistry, of men engaged in the creation of a new life . . .

[W]riters and artists should know that the genuine creator of great art is always the people. No excellent work of art fails to command the people's love, and if a work of art does not enjoy the people's understanding and appreciation, it cannot be an excellent one. Our writers and artists must delve deeply into the life of the people, study popular literature, oral literature, folk songs, etc. . . . It is necessary to preserve the fine features peculiar to our nation in all spheres of folk song, music, dance, etc., and, at the same time create new rhythms, new melodies and new forms demanded by the new

life. . . . While taking over and developing our literary and art heritage, we should study that which is excellent and progressive in the literature and art of the Soviet Union, China, and other People's Democracies, thereby enriching our national culture still further.

Looked at closely, Kim channeled not just Mao, but also elements of Soviet ideology, and Armstrong (2003b, 170) humorously points out that Stalin, in turn, unwittingly channeled Plato. Given that the late 1940s was when Soviet influence on Pyongyang was at its greatest, Kim, or rather his speechwriters, would have been aware of Andrei Zhdanov's concluding speech to the January 1948 meeting of Soviet music workers<sup>19</sup> (or, but less likely, of the file of complaints about music that Stalin allegedly possessed, and which Zhdanov made use of; Maksimenkov 2013, 256). Indeed, the North Korean press once claimed that Zhdanov traveled to the Soviet Far East to meet Kim in August 1945, a month before Kim made his lauded return to Pyongyang.<sup>20</sup> Zhdanov's speech was about the control of artistic production (Fairclough 2016, 201–13), and it left six leading Soviet composers denounced, including Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975), Sergei Prokofiev (1891–1953), and Aram Khachaturian (1903–1978), which surely signaled likely challenges ahead for the artists who had abandoned Seoul for Pyongyang. The immediate context of Zhdanov's speech was Stalin's criticism of Muradeli's opera “*Velikaya Druzhba*/The Great Friendship,” and it prepared the ground for the well-known resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, carried in *Pravda* two weeks later, on February 11, 1948.<sup>21</sup> Kim's speeches do seem to echo Zhdanov (as, arguably, do elements of *juche*). To illustrate, here are some excerpts from the Soviet minister's January 1948 speech, which chime with Kim's speeches on art and music:

Classical music is marked by its truthfulness and realism, its ability to blend brilliant artistic form with profound content, and to combine the highest technical achievement with simplicity and intelligibility . . .<sup>22</sup>

Half-forgotten is Glinka's<sup>23</sup> “The people create the music [and] the artists merely arrange.” . . . It is not enough to give glowing assurances that you are all for popular music. If you are, then why is so little folk music used in your compositions?

Our composers must reorient themselves and turn toward their people. All of them must realize that our party, expressing the interests of our state

and our people, will support only a healthy and progressive trend in music, the trend of Soviet socialist realism . . .

We Bolsheviks do not deny our cultural heritage. On the contrary, we subject to a critical study the cultural heritage of all peoples and all ages in order to draw from it all that can inspire the working people.

In Moscow two decades earlier, in 1927, the cultural commissar and playwright Anatoly Lunacharsky was one of the first to apply Stalin's dictum that cultural production should be socialist in content and national in form (Frolova-Walker 1998, 331–71). Policy had begun to move away from the avant-garde, as it had been celebrated in earlier years in, say, the architect Vladimir Tatlin's "Monument to the Third International" (1920), or Kazimir Malevich's art, toward what became known as socialist realism. Socialist realism, mentioned in Zhdanov's 1948 speech, grew from a 1933 essay penned by Maxim Gorky, and was applied to music by the critic Viktor Gorodinsky in the same year, in the very first issue of the journal *Sovetskaya Muzyka*. It was taken up by Stalin at the 1934 First All-Union Congress of Soviet Writers. Although it became, in the musicologist Richard Taruskin's (1997, 89) words, "a Venus flytrap" that "managed to gobble up" all other options for creativity, it is best seen less as a unified theory than as a "canonical doctrine defined by its patristic texts" (Clark 1981, 261–64). Commentators typically identify five components: reflection (in which true reality is framed by ideology), typicality (concentrating on the historical dialectic), revolutionary romanticism (having a tendency towards hyperbole), popular spirit (clearly and unambiguously of the people and for the people), and subjectness (reflecting both the people and the party) (Günther 1984, 18–54, as cited in Myers 1994, 40–41).

Myers struggles to ally North Korean literature to socialist realism, but Gabroussenko (2010, 5–11) resists what she regards as Myers's narrow interpretation, pointing out that loyalty and policy are not static but evolve. They must, as Max Hayward (1963) argues in his discussion of Soviet literature, be interpreted at a given moment, and this allows change over time. Usefully, a 1966 Soviet encyclopedia of music cited by both Malcolm Brown (1974, 557) and Cindy Fox (1977, 201) points out that socialist realism reflects the present reality but also involves a leap of imagination.<sup>24</sup> In some respects, "Sea of Blood" actually looks back further than socialist realism, to the 1905 speech by Lenin in which he proclaimed that literature—for

which we may substitute all arts—should not be an individual production but part of the common cause of the proletariat, “a cog and a screw of one great mechanism” (1962, 45). Starting from this point, all five North Korean revolutionary operas do present the “correct understanding” demanded by socialist realism. First, underdogs are at the heart of the revolution, whether a mother, a nurse, or a daughter (reflection; particularly, “Sea of Blood,” “The Flower Girl,” “True Daughter,” “Oh! Tell”). Second, the operas are historical, reflecting the tyranny of landlords and colonialists in earlier times (typicality; particularly, “The Flower Girl”). Third, they recount tales familiar to all, about struggles that were overcome by the socialist revolution (popular spirit; especially, “Mount Kūmgang”). Fourth, they recognize that the people owe everything to the leadership of Kim Il Sung (subjectness; all operas).

Socialist realism, then, proved attractive to Pyongyang for its utility, for what it excluded and because of the control it generated. Utility came because it echoed the Confucian belief that the arts, including music, should embody the ethical code of society. Equally, though, it created a framework for excluding the high art tradition of the Korean court and literati, and anything deemed resurrectionist or revivalist. It avoided nihilism, the “denial of the brilliant heritage left to us by our ancestors,” as Kim Il Sung put it, because, from a nationalist perspective, it regarded court and literati culture as little more than a lazy imitation of Chinese-originating traditions that had no place in a modern Korea. Control was ensured because writers and artists worked within a hierarchy that enforced conformity at all levels, as had long been the case in the Soviet Union: a ministry under the Korean Workers’ Party at the top; the Federation of Korean Literature and Art Unions acting as a confederation; then unions of writers, artists, and musicians; then institutions; then groups of writers and artists; then individuals.<sup>25</sup>

Beneath these bodies, a self-preserving self-censorship was essential to artists, but, with “one great mechanism” in mind, the creation of “Sea of Blood” tightened control by establishing artistic collectives that jointly took responsibility for *chipchê yesul* (collective art) and *chipchê chângjak* (collective creation). The song composer Ri Myönsang (1908–1989) had, as Chapter 1 noted, worked on the “Sea of Blood” film score, and he led a collective of composers for the opera. Kim Wöngyun, as already noted, took over as the head of the composers’ collective for opera in 1977. Ri did not compose all the music for “Sea of Blood” though, and one song, “*Ilp’yüön tanshim pulgun maüm kanjik hamnida*/I Will Keep My Red Spirit Single-Heartedly,” composed for the earlier film by Söng Tongch’un, provides the foundation

for much of the opera's musical material. It was the composers in the collective who agreed on what music to include, and who then produced additional orchestral works and arrangements based on the opera. The year 1973 saw a "Sea of Blood" symphony, which is credited to two composers, with Kim Yunbong (b.1933) being solely responsible for the first movement and Kim Yŏnggyu (1927–1989) for the third, although Kim Jong Il is given credit for inspiring both (Kim and Rim 1991, 198).

Tightening control was also deemed necessary because, with the Korean Worker's Party considered the voice of the people, revolutionary operas had to reflect party policy. Hence, seed theory (*chongjaron*) emerged. As a term, seed theory appeared in print a year after "Sea of Blood" premiered. It was considered to uphold content above form, squaring the circle in which a seed was both unique to an artist or artist collective but consistent with party policy. As one text puts it, "The seed constitutes the core of art and determines its essential value. Only when the creator of an artwork properly determines the core is he or she able to convey appropriately the ideological and aesthetic intentions and secure the philosophical ground of the work" (Korean Association of Literary Criticism 1990, 20–21).<sup>26</sup> The seed is planted in the content, so that in "The Flower Girl" the basket stands for sorrow and filial duty, but then mutates to become the basket of revolution and destiny.<sup>27</sup> The seed has to be chosen before texts or music can be written, hence librettos must be created before music is composed. The seed distills fact and fiction down to an unchallengeable single account of history. Allegory rather than strict realism is expected. The unfortunate result, though, is that opera characters tend to remain, as Kim Jong Il accepted was a problem in film, flat and crude archetypes lacking emotional depth. One could argue this is no different from Western operas. However, depictions are rationed in North Korean operas, so subaltern groups, particularly all Koreans apart from feudal left-behinds, are good, and every Japanese and American is bad. To take this further, the figure of Mother in "Sea of Blood" and Kkotpun in "The Flower Girl" represent the Korean nation, and their characters collapse representations of national identity (after Kyung Hyun Kim 1996, 93).

Music, although deemed fundamental, must serve the seed. But, this creates a circular mechanism in which conformity removes feedback. So while writers and artists are important in the construction of symbols for the party that are to be popularized to press home ideology, the party and its ideology is rendered essential to the sense of selfhood that writers and artists possess (after Verdery 1991, 78–87, 304). Suk-Young Kim thus argues

that Stalin’s dictum, “writers are the engineers of the soul,” in North Korea became “performers are the trainers of political correctness” (2010, 51). Revolutionary operas were the models that governed creativity and conformity, serving as the scaffolding for ideological theory.<sup>28</sup> The result was, and still is today, that production came to be censored from within, but also from without, generating layers of control that rendered novelty largely redundant. Layers may be adjusted over time,<sup>29</sup> but from revolutionary operas forward, dissent in literature and art production disappeared as artists and writers reverted to stereotypes that channeled duty, dedication, and selfless sacrifice at the expense of formal structures and any creative license. That this remains the case today can be starkly seen in the 2016 documentary “Liberation Day,” in which the Slovakian band Laibach fails to negotiate the different layers of censorship prior to a concert in Pyongyang.<sup>30</sup>

### Before revolutionary opera

One reason why Pyongyang needed to look beyond its own borders as it developed revolutionary operas was because, prior to 1945, Western opera had been largely unknown on the Korean peninsula.<sup>31</sup> Western music, initially experienced through brass bands and Christian hymns, had begun to make inroads in the late nineteenth century, and a few opera singers gave recitals in Seoul during the 1920s and 1930s, often traveling to or from Tokyo and Shanghai (mid-1920s advertisements for the Trans-Siberian Railway show it running from Beijing through Pyongyang to Pusan in Korea, from where a ferry plied the route to Japan). One of the first singers known to have visited Seoul was the baritone Giulio Ronconi, in 1923,<sup>32</sup> but the first documented performance of a grand opera, Verdi’s “La Traviata,” took place in Seoul in 1947, after the division of the peninsula. There is little to indicate that opera was staged on a grand scale when Soviet singers, much as they did in Vietnam and China, began to tour in North Korea. Some operas were, nonetheless, performed in Pyongyang during its first 15 years as a separate state, including Tchaikovsky’s heavyweight “Eugene Onegin” (1879), put on in 1958 by students trained by Soviet advisers to mark the ninth anniversary of the founding of Pyongyang Music College.<sup>33</sup> Two Western-style operas by Korean composers, Kim Oksŏng’s “*Rangnang kongju*/Rangnang Princess,” completed in November 1945, and Kim Sunnam’s “*Inmin yugyŏktae*/People’s Revolutionaries,” completed before he was purged and sent into internal exile, were performed. Later commentaries by Kang

Yŏnghŭi (1975, 2ff) and Nam Yŏngil (1991, 126ff) state that no opera proved popular, but to say so was required after Kim Jong Il's *On the Art of Opera* included the comment that all operas before "Sea of Blood" had "failed to cater to the tastes and sentiments of our people," because they were "infected with flunkeyism and dogmatism" (1974, 3).

Operas, small and large, needed venues, and the early twentieth century was when Western-style theaters began to be built in Korea, starting in Seoul. The first, the circular Hyŏmnyulsa, funded by King Kojong, opened near East Gate in 1902 (Pak Hwang 1976, 15–31; Paek Hyŏnmi 2009). At one point, more than 140 performers, including musicians and dancers, were contracted to it.<sup>34</sup> Other new theaters that staged music and dance included the Kwangmudae and Tansŏngsa. Theaters encouraged the development of *p'ansori*, Korea's home-grown equivalent to opera, an epic storytelling through song tradition that had to this point been performed by a single singer accompanied by a drummer.<sup>35</sup> In new theaters, troupes of singers began to take to the stage, adapting the five stories that in South Korea still form the core for the *p'ansori* genre, and adding new repertoires, creating a genre usually referred to today as *ch'anggŭk* (sung theater).<sup>36</sup> *P'ansori*, but also early *ch'anggŭk*, mixed three elements: speech (*aniri*), song (*norae*), and a limited amount of dramatic action (*pallim*). In *ch'anggŭk*, roles in a story were typically split between individual singers, with a narrator standing to the side, but until post-liberation times there was little staging and little acting. Instead, singers stood and sang.

*P'ansori* was associated primarily with the southwestern Chŏlla provinces, and early theaters were centered on Seoul. So although troupes toured the northern provinces during the 1930s, the tradition was always better known in the territory that is today South Korea. Still, *ch'anggŭk* continued to be performed until 1964 in North Korea and across the border among Chinese Koreans in Jilin Province (Cho Un et al. 1955),<sup>37</sup> and the hybrid folk-song-based narrative associated with the northern part of the peninsula, "*Paebaengi kut*/Ritual for Paebaengi," was adapted as a *ch'anggŭk* and performed at the National People's Art Theater (Kungnip minjok yesul kŭkch'ang) in Pyongyang in 1958 (*Chosŏn ūmak* 1958/8, 23–39, 1958/9, 34–35; Chang Tongun 1982; Kim Namho 1995, 59).<sup>38</sup> The five core inherited *p'ansori* stories explore injustice within the feudal, hierarchical system of traditional Korea, and so, arguably, had the potential to be rendered ideologically sound within the socialist North.<sup>39</sup> For example, "*Ch'unhyangjŏn*/Story of 'Spring Fragrance'" tells the story of the daughter (Ch'unhyang) of a courtesan who falls in love and secretly marries the son (Yi Mongnyong) of a



magistrate, although such alliances between low-class commoners (*sangmin*) and aristocratic elites (*ryangban*<sup>40</sup>) were not permitted during the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910). Mongnyong leaves to take civil service exams in Seoul, and a new magistrate casts Ch’unhyang into prison when she refuses to become his concubine. Mongnyong returns as a secret inspector, exposes the evil magistrate, and releases Ch’unhyang.

As a *ch’anggŭk*, “*Ch’unhyangjŏn*” was staged in Pyongyang in May 1948,<sup>41</sup> with the composer Ri Myŏnsang and the *sanjo* specialist An Kiok contributing new music. It was revived in 1952, 1954, and 1962, and a film was released in 1959. The 1962 revival survives in a 1964 recording reissued in 2006 in South Korea, and this recording illustrates how vocalization had been modified toward the *juche* voice.<sup>42</sup> In 1980 a second film appeared, for which Kim Jong Il famously gave advice: in 1992 I visited the Pyongyang Film Studios, where one studio was given over to preserve Kim’s “brilliant” recommendation to hang a small model of a city gate in front of the camera so that a crowd scene could be realistically filmed without the need to build a full-sized set populated by a massive crowd of extras. In 1985 a third film adaptation appeared, “Love, Love, My Love,” directed by Shin Sangok during his forced stay in Pyongyang, and finally, in 1988, “*Ch’unhyangjŏn*” became a national opera (*minjok kagŭk*), adapting some of the 1962 music to the revolutionary opera format.

Discussions about reforming *p’ansori* and *ch’anggŭk* began in Pyongyang soon after liberation, initially at the Old Korean Music Research Institute (Chosŏn kojŏn ūmak yŏnguso) and the National Arts Theater (Kungnip yesul kŭkch’ang). The first notable result was the 1948 staging, with some new music, of “*Ch’unhyangjŏn*.” Discussions also took place in the Federation of Korean Literature and Art Unions and, after its founding in 1953, in its subsidiary, the Korean Composers Union (Chosŏn chakkokka tongmaeng).<sup>43</sup> Consideration was given to introducing more of a folk-song style, thereby reducing the complex vocalization of *p’ansori*—primarily huskiness (*t’aksŏng* or *sswaeksori*), but also the cause of this, which was the “breaking of the voice” that *p’ansori* singers had long considered necessary to expand their vocal range and enable them to sing continuously for several hours. Singers traditionally trained by going on 100-day pilgrimages, competing with waterfalls and filling caves with their voices. They would sing until their throats bled (hence, breaking the voice), but this was alien to the nurturing of voices in Western opera, as well as to the light lyricism required in Pyongyang. There were also nasal production and glottal stops to contend with: “*Ang, ang, ang*. How can people sing like that when they are educated?” was how the musicologist Ri Ch’angu angrily put it to me in June 1992.



Back in the 1950s, critics argued that male and female singers needed differentiated melodies, splitting apart what is commonly said to be the extended four-octave range of *p'ansori* into more “natural” ranges. As with folk songs, there was also a push to abandon the integral southwestern vocal characteristics. One composition that attempted to make changes was Kim Chinmyōng's “*Kang kōnno maūresō saenoraē tūllyōnda/A New Song Flows out of the Village across the River*,” staged in 1960. Concurrently, as *juche* as a cultural ideology was worked out, a flurry of articles appeared in the journal *Chosŏn ūmak* between 1958 and 1962.<sup>44</sup> These witnessed a shift, many in line with the title of one, “*Uri noraerūl tō chal purūgi wihayō!*” (Let's produce our songs even better!), or, placing politics center stage, in line with Kim Hangmun's “*Pansoriwa ch'anggŭk yōnguesō pimakchuūi chōn p'yōnhyangŭl kūnjōlhada!*” (Let's fully eliminate non-Marxist inclinations in our studies of *p'ansori* and *ch'anggŭk*!).

Much the same happened among Chinese Koreans across the border in Yanbian. Sun Hee Koo defines operas created there in the 1970s as still being *ch'anggŭk*-like and incorporating *p'ansori* modes (2007, 56–57, 60; confirmed by Um 2013, 173), but the educationist Kim Namho only lists *p'ansori* events in Yanbian until 1961, thereafter identifying nothing before 1991. Kim defends the genre as descending from folk songs and rather simplistically explains vocalization changes (1995, 54–59).<sup>45</sup> Debates about reforming minority music took place across China, and in the 1950s some musicologists labelled Western operatic singing as “scientific,” regarding minority vocal styles as backward and potentially damaging. The high tessitura used in traditional Chinese opera was one aspect singled out for criticism, although this may well have served as a mask for criticizing androgyny.<sup>46</sup> Arguments again flared in 1963, when, even though new repertoires such as the model work “Red Detachment” were being developed, political realities meant that local vocal styles promoted through song and dance ensembles were above criticism (Kraus 1989, 117–18). Again, in Russia, discussions about including folk songs in new creativity stretch back into the nineteenth century, but they were revived in the 1930s and 1940s, when incorporating local music was understood to satisfy the “realism” requirement of Soviet socialist realism. Related arguments were made by supporters of *p'ansori* in North Korea:

We should develop *p'ansori*. There is no reason at all why *p'ansori* should disappear or be removed. *P'ansori* was created by the Korean people and has served the Korean people [well]. (Cho Un 1958, 21; trans. Yu Youngmin 2007, 61)

Some argued that *ch'anggük* had validity within a socialist state because it was proletarian, devised for new public stages rather than serving the elite who had once sponsored *p'ansori* (see, e.g., Min Pyŏngch'öl 1990). Discussions about change do not, though, hide the fact that some accomplished *p'ansori* singers initially developed successful careers in North Korea, just as traditional instrumentalists did. Pak Tongshil (1897–1968), for example, a singer active during the colonial period in both Kwangju in South Ch'ŏlla Province and Seoul, migrated northward in 1950.<sup>47</sup> Prior to 1945 he was known for a new *p'ansori*-style work, “*Yŏlsaga*/Song of the Patriots,” which told of four independence fighters, An Chunggün, Yi Chun, Yun Pongil, and Yu Kwansun. Of these four, An (1879–1910) remains a national hero in North Korea, because in 1909 he assassinated the Japanese four-time prime minister Itō Hirobumi at Harbin railway station as Japan began to consolidate its control over Korea. For this, An was executed at Port Arthur, today part of Dalian, in March 1910.<sup>48</sup> “*Yŏlsaga*” was banned in South Korea after Pak left for the North, until a recording by Yi Sŏnggün and Ch'ŏng Sunim was approved under the democratizing government of Kim Yŏngsam in 1994 (Synnara SYNCD047–048).

Pak was lauded in Pyongyang. He was appointed merit artist in 1955 and people's artist in 1961, and worked at the Pyongyang Music College from 1956 onward. He joined both the Old Korean Music Research Institute and the National Arts Theater, and in 1955 he set about staging a new version of a second *p'ansori* story, “*Shimch'ŏngjŏn*/Story of the Filial Daughter.”<sup>49</sup> Revivals of this were mounted in 1958 and 1959 at the Music College. “*Shimch'ŏngjŏn*” relates how the daughter of a blind widower sells herself to sailors as a sacrifice to the ocean dragon king to pay for an offering to Buddha that monks fraudulently claim will restore her father's sight. The king sends her back to land, where she marries the emperor. She throws a party for all blind people in Korea. Her father comes and, hearing her voice, miraculously opens his eyes. Pak is known to have explored new vocal styles as he worked on his production of “*Shimch'ŏngjŏn*” and on other works in the *ch'anggük* format that set socialist texts, including “*Kim changgunŭl ttarŭja*/Following General Kim,” “*Sŏngni ŭi 10 wŏl*/October Victory” and “*Haebang ŭi norae*/Song of Liberation.”

A second singer who moved to Pyongyang was the *ch'anggük* specialist Cho Sangsŏn (1909–1983). He, too, became a merit artist in 1955 and a people's artist in 1959, and he sang in both the “*Ch'unhyangjŏn*” and “*Shimch'ŏngjŏn*” revivals. He was involved in new opera creation, including

"*Ri Sunshin changgun*/General Ri Sunshin" (1952), "*Hwanghae ŭi norae*/Song of Hwanghae Province" (1960), and "*Hongnumong*/Dream of the Red Chamber" (1962). The South Korean musicologist Kwŏn Osŏng has explored Cho's recordings and those of others working with *ch'anggŭk* and concludes, first, that those specializing in the staged form had already begun to modify vocal production during the colonial period—that is, before 1945—as a result of splitting male from female roles when multiple singers took to the stage.<sup>50</sup> In doing so, they reduced the expected vocal range, rendering the long training process, and its resultant husky voice, unnecessary. However, Kwŏn assigns the adoption of Western diatonic scales and a plainer vocalization to post-1945 North Korea (2013, 302).

A third *ch'anggŭk* work based on one of the five core *p'ansori* stories was revived in Pyongyang in 1948 and again in 1958, "*Hŭngboga*/Story of Two Brothers," a tale about inheritance in which a nasty older brother leaves his younger sibling to struggle in abject poverty. Still, the days of the old were numbered. In a November 7, 1964, speech to workers in the field of literature and art, "On creating revolutionary literature and art," Kim Il Sung sealed its fate. He commented that "A New Song Flows out of the Village across the River" appealed to him, but then added, "It seems to be advisable to develop national music after this." He attacked the old genre directly:

*P'ansori* lacks interest since it is old-fashioned. The ballads of the southern provinces are what *ryangban* would chant over wine cups in those days when they used to wear horsehair hats<sup>51</sup> and get about on the donkey's back. . . . *P'ansori* does not inspire the people nor arouse them to struggle. It is utterly ridiculous to imagine soldiers rushing into battle inspired by *p'ansori*. It is unthinkable that songs which the aristocrats of old days used to sing while drinking could suit the emotions of our youth who are building socialism.

Koreans generally have beautiful voices, and it is really terrible to hear a good-looking girl make hoarse sounds. You may be able to stand the hoarse noise of a man or Ch'unhyang's old mother, but it simply makes you really sick to hear [young] Ch'unhyang utter such tones . . . Contrary to the opinion of some, it is wrong to consider this husky voice a vocalization suitable for our national melody. It is not natural but artificial . . . You should choose vocalizations which permit natural, mellow and beautiful tones. The husky noise should decidedly be eliminated.<sup>52</sup>

The die was cast. After the publication of *Kagŭk ch'anggŭk sŏng'okchip* (Staged Traditional Opera Theater Song Collection) in 1963,<sup>53</sup> the last major production featuring *ch'anggŭk* was “*Nyŏsŏng hyŏngmyŏngga*/Song of the Revolutionary Women” in 1964.<sup>54</sup> A brief revival of “*Shimchŏngjŏn*” came in early 1966, and there is evidence that some continued to argue to retain the *ch'anggŭk* form,<sup>55</sup> but to no avail. Henceforth, national operas were alone to remain the acceptable face of historically-themed staged musical theater, and capitulation came in the December 1966 issue of *Chosŏn ŭmak*, where one such opera, “*Mugunghwa kkot sujŏn*/Rose of Sharon Flower Battle,” was the focus of six short articles (1966/12, 15–25). It was, though, only in 1988, with “*Ch'unhyangjŏn*” recycled as a national opera, that *p'ansori* was fully transformed into what ideologues found acceptable. Overseen, according to the introduction to its full score (1991, 3), by Kim Jong Il, and with Kim Il Sung attending its premiere on October 28, 1988, “*Ch'unhyangjŏn*” was announced to have become an opera for the people, whereas previously “people could not love it, because it did not reflect true life.” According to Nam Yŏngil, even though it told of a courtesan tradition now long gone, it reflected the same feudal suffering that the heroine Kkotpun faced in “The Flower Girl.” Juche ideology had now, finally, been properly embraced by rewriting its central song, “*Sarangga*/Song of Love,” and creating new music that erased “all problems” associated with *p'ansori* from the past (Nam 1991, 136–41). Again, “Dream of the Red Chamber” became a national opera in 2009 for the Sea of Blood Company’s sold-out Chinese tour, but the claim for this being new, made in the South Korean journal *Koreana* but reflecting Pyongyang’s promotion, overlooks the 1962 *ch'anggŭk* version, which had been discussed in *Chosŏn ŭmak* at length (1963/1, 1963/2, 1965/8):

North Korea created an opera titled “*Hongnumong*” . . . and claimed 2009 as the “Year of North Korea-China Friendship.” The opera . . . represented the first attempt in North Korea to adapt a foreign classical work to the stage since its proclamation of juche ideology in the 1970s. (Jeon Young-sun 2013)<sup>56</sup>

Even though *p'ansori* dropped from public view, it may not have been abandoned. Rather, as with redundant instruments, there are tantalizing hints that something of it may be preserved. In 1992 I heard students rehearsing *p'ansori* as I walked along a corridor at the Pyongyang Music and Dance College. When I commented on this to Ri Ch'anggu, he merely smiled. Again,

a volume of old lyric songs—the literati genres of *shijo* and *kasa*, long associated with the elite rather than with the general populace, and so no longer allowed to be performed—was unexpectedly published in 1998, replete with the biographies of three singers who had worked in Pyongyang well into the 1970s (Ch'oe Ch'angho 1998). It is tempting to follow South Korean commentators and search for remnants of traditional music in the North's cultural production, as, for example, the books edited by Kwŏn Osŏng (2001) and Hwang Chunyŏn (2002) do. Equally, though, we may sometimes feel, as Hwang Pyŏnggi (1984) did, that no traditional music remains. Hwang, incidentally, revised his opinion after encountering the instrumental folk-art genre of *sanjo* in Pyongyang when he led a delegation of artists from South Korea there in 1990.<sup>57</sup>

### Beyond revolutionary opera

Although the five revolutionary operas were first performed in the early 1970s, settings of several of their stories had been completed earlier: “*Millima iyagi hara*/Oh! Tell the Forest,” the folk-song-based “*Pulkke p'inŭn kkot*/Selling Red Flowers,” and the dance work “*Kkot p'anŭn ch'ŏnsalli*/The Flower Seller of Ch'ŏnsan Village” had all been created by the early 1960s.<sup>58</sup> And, subsequent to their premieres, revolutionary operas were filmed for distribution. They were repeatedly performed and regularly broadcast, and their songs were rearranged and recast in all manner of ways. The operas were dissected in two officially sanctioned tomes (Kim Kyŏnghŭi and Rim Sangho 1991; Kim Ch'ŏewŏn 1991). “Sea of Blood” was celebrated with a set of stamps, issued in 1974, and Kkotpun from “The Flower Girl” was memorialized by being depicted on a domestic bank bill. Murals of Mother from “Sea of Blood” and Kkotpun were erected either side of the Pyongyang Grand Theater's entrance, the home of the Sea of Blood Company. The company received the Kim Il Sung Prize in 1972. But while revolutionary operas displaced what had been produced before, five works is too few to keep a company, with performers, directors, librettists, choreographers, and composers, permanently busy. It is, surely, too small a corpus to keep audiences queuing for tickets. So, much as the eight Chinese model works were supplemented during the years of the Cultural Revolution—with some new works, such as “Azalea Mountain” and “*Nimeng song*/Ode to Nimeng Mountain,” revisiting the same themes, and others, such as “*Longjiang song*/Ode to Dragon River,”

moving to new territory (“Dragon River” is set in the 1960s)—opera production continued in North Korea, and it did so under the watchful eye of Kim Jong Il. First additional revolutionary operas were created, starting with “*Han chawidanwŏn ŭi ūnmyŏng*/Fate of a Self-Defence Corps Man” (1974).<sup>59</sup> This recast a 1970 film “masterpiece” of the same name,<sup>60</sup> and was a formulaic variation on the model, dark through seven acts, then light for a brief finale. The libretto and score state it was written in the 1930s by independence fighters. Briefly told, during the colonial period, villagers struggle under forced labor. Young men are coerced into joining the Japanese-sponsored self-defense corps, told that if they volunteer then elder villagers will receive reduced work quotas. The hero, Kamnyong, joins, but is repeatedly told—much as in “Oh! Tell”—that he is a stooge for the Japanese. He is sworn at by the villagers he wants to protect, and only reveals his true spirit when his friends Manshik and Chŏlsam are shot and his father is beaten senseless by the heartless Japanese—much the same, then, as in “Sea of Blood.” He rises up, shoots the commander and routs the foreign aggressors, marching off with his comrades to join the revolutionary army. Two further revolutionary operas were produced,<sup>61</sup> “*Chŏngch’un kwawŏn*/Chŏngch’un Orchard” (1974) and, again recalling the women’s volunteer force, but now set during the Korean War when the enemy was America, “*Namgang maül ryŏsŏngdŭl*/The Heroines of South River Village” (1973). The latter echoes the Chinese “White Tiger Regiment,” particularly when in the second scene of Act 6, before all becomes light as the finale eulogizes the peerless leader Kim Il Sung, the troops win a victory:

Soldiers of the Korean People’s Army are seen rushing towards Height 355. They wage a hand-to-hand fight with the desperate enemies. . . . The people run behind the soldiers, carrying ammunition on their shoulders. [American] and south<sup>62</sup> Korean puppet soldiers fall with agonizing cries. Triumphant hurrahs burst out over the height and [our] flag . . . flutters high in the sky. On the summit, the soldiers and people embrace each other, overjoyed with victory.

The early 1970s were a busy time. Two further operas, described simply as operas (*kagŭk*) rather than as revolutionary, were produced: “*Ŭnhyeroun haebicharae*/Songs Under the Graceful Sunshine” (1972) and “*Yŏnp’ung’ho*/Yŏnp’ung Lake” (1973). Both are set in contemporary times, making any revolutionary claim difficult. “Yŏnp’ung Lake” was premiered by the South

P'yŏngan Arts Troupe (and also appeared as a film) and tells how farming was collectivized around a scenic lake in the P'yŏngan region.<sup>63</sup> Another opera was "*Palgŭn t'aeyang arae-esŏ*/Raise the Red Sun" (1976). There were also attempts at spectacular stage shows, such as "*Yŏnggwang ŭi norae*/Song of Glory" (1982), much like "Song of Paradise" but overseen by Kim Jong Il for a cast of 5,000 to celebrate Kim Il Sung's seventieth birthday. Charles Mackerras glosses the latter as Pyongyang's answer to China's "The East Is Red," albeit "larger in scale, louder, more intense, more complicated, and more adulatory of the leader" (1984, 86–87).<sup>64</sup> The adulation of Kim Il Sung, photographed at its first performance clapping and congratulating the cast, was confirmed when the work was awarded the state's top prize, the Kim Il Sung Prize, by, of course, Kim. "Song of Glory" offers what in 1982 was the most complete account of the official history of the state and its leader in any cultural production. Its first act starts with Kim's early years in his home, Man'gyŏngdae, and his departure into Manchurian exile with his mother, while the second recounts how Kim established *juche*. The third act depicts victory over Japanese colonialism and Kim's speech to the nation in September 1945, while the fourth takes in victory in the Korean War. Act 5 is Chŏllima and reconstruction, Act 6 the socialist revolution, and Act 7 projects forward to the utopian future under *juche*.

"Yŏnp'ung Lake," along with "The Amnok Riverbank Beacon" (which was introduced in Chapter 1), illustrates the settled orchestration style for operas, with Western and national musicians sitting together: each of the four *haegŭm* parts duplicate the Western string section (violin, viola, cello, bass), and although much the same happens with Western and national winds, the national *tanŏ* vertical flute, *chŏdae* transverse flute, and *p'iri* oboe are given solo parts. Only Western brass instruments are used. The texture, then, is predominantly Western, rendering the claim that juxtaposing Western and national instruments creates a "third" sound somewhat spurious. However, Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il's demands that national instruments should dominate can be said to be achieved simply because national instruments take solo roles. Note that a decade later "*Ch'unhyangjŏn*" did attempt greater distinction between Western and national, separating violins from *so haegŭm* parts, but it also brought back a vibraphone and marimba that were previously part of "Sea of Blood" and "True Daughter," added a synthesizer, and used these to counterpoint the new *ongnyugŭm* harp zither as though—even if ideologues will regard this as heretical—national instruments must be reined in and kept under control.<sup>65</sup>



## What Revolutionary Operas Do

### Revolutionary operas as song operas

In June 1992 I interviewed the celebrated composer Kim Wŏn'gyun, who at the time oversaw the composer's collective at the Sea of Blood Opera Company. A new work was being developed, "*Nodong kyegŭmmul*"/The Worker's Proletariat," and Kim succinctly introduced many of the elements that Pyongyang's commentators contend make revolutionary operas distinct:

I have led the Sea of Blood composer collective since 1977. There are 13 or 14 of us composers, and we work together. We compose pieces separately but together choose only the best to include. Nowadays, I no longer compose, but I give advice on the works of others. "Sea of Blood" was written by Kim Il Sung during the war of resistance against Japan. We created a big and modern revolutionary opera based on his story. Kim Jong Il gave us advice, and because of him we were able to complete it.

"Sea of Blood" operas are different from any previous operas. They match the tastes of Korean people. Our genre is a new form that did not exist before. What is new? Well, everybody is able to sing along with the songs, because we created couplets (*chŏlga*). We make operas (*kagŭk*) with songs (*kayo*). And, offstage choruses (*pangch'ang*) are sung in the orchestral pit while actors are on stage. There are three chorus types, and each has a particular role: male (*nam pangch'ang*), female (*yŏ pangch'ang*), and grand [mixed] (*tae pangch'ang*).<sup>1</sup> The choruses explain the plot, revealing the minds of the characters and the ideological messages. They also act as the third person. The Great General [Kim Jong Il] invented *pangch'ang* and gave it its various forms. You can't find anything like *pangch'ang* in any other performance art in the world. . . . Also, the stage setting for revolutionary operas is big. We have very flexible, movable stages, and this style of staging was first introduced in "Sea of Blood."



We are working on a new opera right now, “The Worker’s Proletariat.” No opera has yet been written about the working class. Italy, France, and Russia have produced many classical operas, but they are about love, myths, and legends, and some modern topics. None are about the working class. So, the Great General asked us to create it. He is writing the libretto, and once he has finished it, we will add the music. We will complete everything by the end of the year. It is a big challenge, because . . . it is so much more difficult to write about the working class than about love and old myths and old legends.

At the Pyongyang Film Studios, I was shown where Kim Jong Il supposedly created the first *pangchàng*, and where he corrected and reworked the lyrics to a song; pages of the annotated text and notation were framed on the wall behind the preserved desk at which he had sat (Figure 6.1). Kim makes

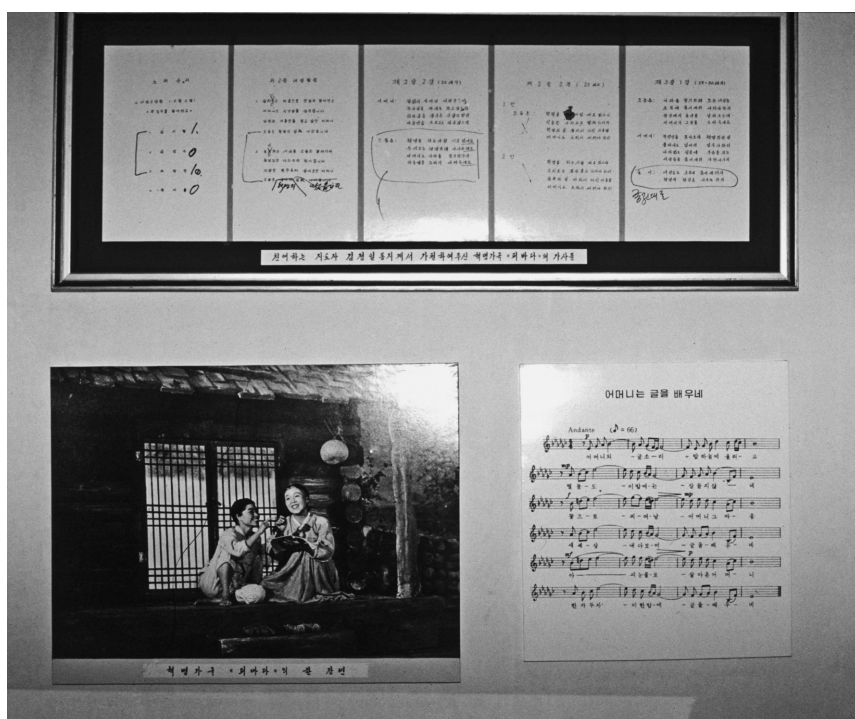


Figure 6.1 Memorial at the Pyongyang Film Studios to Kim Jong Il's on-the-spot guidance for Mother's literacy song in "*P'i pada*/Sea of Blood." Photo by Keith Howard.

the first-person claim that the concept of an offstage chorus is new in his *On the Art of Opera*; conventional operas, he contends, use characters onstage and the orchestra offstage to develop drama, but the choruses “provide a link between the stage and the audience, and help the characters to perform well” (1994, 9).

The claims are considerable, but the reality, as Verdi aficionados and others will attest to, is rather different. Even if one reason for ignoring off-stage choruses elsewhere could be because North Korea has largely sealed itself off from the international community for much of its existence, or because North Koreans have had few opportunities to experience European opera, *pangch'ang* do have two distinctive functions. First, they reflect the innermost emotions of actors, providing interpretation for the audience in an anti-Brechtian fashion (after David-West 2006, 79). By extension, they also interpret dance. *Pangch'ang*, it is claimed, allow the drama to unfold in a stereoscopic way, “penetrating into [the] mental world of the heroes in organic combination with songs on stage and the orchestra,” and strengthening the “dynamism of musical development.”<sup>2</sup> Hence, the chorus will often initiate a song, or will take over from a soloist, shifting from drama to reflection, or from reflection to drama, allowing the characters on stage to concentrate on acting. When Kkotpun grieves at her mother’s grave in “The Flower Girl,” the *pangch'ang* tells of her misery, starting by sympathizing with all those who are parentless, then, in a second stanza, commenting on Kkotpun and her blind sister, and finally, rising in pitch and volume, shouting out that a feudal society with evil landowners has no place in the contemporary world. Second, most importantly, and as Kim Wŏngyun alluded to, *pangch'ang* allow portability. The most famous *pangch'ang* of all comes at the beginning and end of “The Flower Girl”: “Spring Comes Every Year” (see Notation 4.1). This is an iconic song known to all in North Korea, but one also loved by many Chinese.<sup>3</sup> In it, the seed is not the first line but the fourth, not “On the hills and in the fields, Fair flowers blossom . . .” but “Hearts robbed of our homeland and of spring:” that is, under feudalism and colonialism, the hearts of Koreans were stolen, their associations with the homeland broken, and their enjoyment of the seasons destroyed.

In a further interview I conducted in 1992, the director of the Isang Yun Music Research Institute, Chŏng Pongsŏk, explained both *pangch'ang* off-stage choruses and *chŏlga* couplets:

Opera must match our people’s character. Consider recitatives, which don’t fit our way of doing things and don’t match our deep heart-felt emotions. We don’t have recitatives. We just sing. Think of arias, where, to sing an aria properly, you must develop really skillful techniques that enable you to reach high tones beyond the range of a normal voice. In Bizet’s *Carmen* the tenor has to go so high that he can’t properly sing all the notes that are written. We require a more normal singing style, not falsetto, not artificial. So, in place of fancy arias, we have couplets (*chŏlga*). We also have a unique style of song known by a purely Korean word, *pangch’ang*. This uses couplets but is sung offstage to allow the drama to shine through.

Consider Verdi’s *La Traviata*, where Violetta is expected to sing as she dies on the stage. This may be good music, but the scene has no realism, since nobody can sing when they are dead. *Pangch’ang*, using *chŏlga*, allow a chorus to describe what is going on while the characters on stage concentrate on acting.

Chŏng’s choices of Bizet and Verdi were not pulled out of the air. North Korean scholarly knowledge of opera arias is based largely on the two-volume *Segye kagok sŏnjip* (1957 and 1964), the first a collection of arias by Glinka, Verdi, Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Bizet, Smetana, Gounod, and more—including the two examples Chŏng cited—and the second based on Alessandro Parisotti’s well-known *Arie Antiche* compilation from the late nineteenth century.

*Pansori* and *ch’anggŭk* alternate speech and song. So if a continuation of something Korean is to be argued for, the lack of recitative in revolutionary operas is not surprising. Speech is integral to, for example, “True Daughter,” allowing the story to push ahead at a greater pace than song permits. Operas, though, are dominated by songs, and songs are models of simplicity because they are structured in couplets or as stanzas containing several couplets. Juche demands that they must be simple, so they use duple, triple, or quadruple meters that are almost always parsed in sets of 2, 3, or 4 lines. Structures are binary or ternary, and songs are sequenced within each act (Kim Chŏewŏn 1991, 56, 65). Act 1 in “Sea of Blood” offers a sequence of nine songs, sandwiched between an orchestral overture based on the core song, “*P’i padaga*/Song of Sea of Blood” (which, in turn, is actually derived from another song, as discussed later), and a brief orchestral conclusion. The more compact Act 2 of “Oh! Tell” has three songs framed by two *pangch’ang*. And so on.

Using songs as building blocks was not only championed by Kim Jong Il as something new, but it also generated a critique of Western opera:

Our people today do not like amorphous lyrics, complicated rhythms, recitatives that are neither songs nor speeches, outmoded stage-settings and other stereotyped methods of portrayal. . . . In order to overcome the sociohistorical, ideological, and artistic limitations of opera . . . we must conduct a revolution in all domains of opera, the content and form, the system and method of creation. (*On the Art of Opera* 1974, 2)

And:

In Western operas, the aria has been considered the “flower of opera,” capable of describing the hero. . . . In this context, more and more complicated and intricate arias [were] produced whether the people understood them or not. . . . The songs were so difficult to understand, so unnatural to the ear and so difficult to sing that the people did not like them. . . . When “Sea of Blood”-type operas were being created in our country for the first time, some . . . did not regard the stanzaic form as a noble form of music and were reluctant to adopt it. Holding the stanzaic song in contempt is a bourgeois aesthetic view. (*On the Art of Opera* 1974, 25–26)

To Kim, song melodies within operas must be beautiful and harmonious, gentle and lyrical, hence female *pangchang* use the light lyrical *juche* voice, silky and smooth. Songs should also keep spoken Korean stress patterns. I was told by Chŏng Pongsŏk that they should demonstrate locality (*tongsokhwa*) and reflect the daily life of the people (*inminsŏng*), but that incorporating colonial-era songs is allowed. Is any of this new? Ivan Dzherzhinsky’s 1935 opera “*Tikhiy Don*/Quiet Flows the Don” and the song opera genre it generated, in which opera met the Hollywood musical, and in which singable strophic songs were interspersed with spoken dialogue (Anderson 1995), is not dissimilar. The Soviet genre emerged after the “realism” in socialist realism had been established to imply national folk music, and once this was the case (and much as with the “improvement” of instruments, discussed in Chapter 2), encouragement was given to Soviet states to create local operas and to build opera houses in which to stage them (Frolova-Walker 2007, 313–14).

As a general rule, North Korean revolutionary operas replace virtuosity with singability, notwithstanding occasional exceptions that include traces of older arias (particularly where an onstage heroine sings before, or takes over from, an offstage chorus), occasional counterpoint, and duos or trios where the unison melody splits into parts. Folk songs, keeping with the socialist realist trope, use updated forms lacking the ornamentation and aesthetics of old, but are always marked as heritage through orchestrations in which national instruments accompany them. It is singability that makes *chŏlga* portable and detachable, switching them from songs created *for* the people to songs *of* the people. Short leitmotifs generate melodies, suggestive, perhaps, of Wagnerian opera, and each repetition, development, or variation of a leitmotif increases the assurance that the seeds—the messages and the embedded ideology—will be successfully conveyed to the audience. Leitmotifs, then, facilitate ready identification with the seeds in a manner that is a carry-over from compulsory attendance at film showings, where reflection sessions afterward were normalized. Leitmotifs start with a germ. The germ needs to flower, but the result is that leitmotifs can be overused. They arguably have to be, since whereas recitative allows the action to move forward in European opera, there is no such mechanism apart from speech available to revolutionary opera composers. Hence, topics and set forms (*hyŏngshik*) are required, and these are characteristic elements of all five core operas. They equate to the topoi of Wagner’s operas—melodies or forms given a particular expression by motivic arrangements, perhaps through rhythm and melodic contours, or because they stem from preexisting marches or songs, including folk songs (Burnett 2016, 23–24).<sup>4</sup>

Beyond operas, these same elements are constantly repurposed in other works and contexts in what Taruskin dubs, in relation to the use of preexisting Russian melodies by Soviet composers, “genre music” (2008, 246–76 *passim*). Much the same applied to model works during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, where melody was given primacy in repackaged regional versions, or as the instrumental and orchestral “Red Classics” (Mittler 2012, 23; Pang 2017, 95–106). In North Korea, this implicates the everyday sameness that *juche* brought to artistic practice, where topics and set forms became characteristic of the people, the party, and the leaders. Characteristic elements are identified first within folk songs (as introduced in Chapter 1), then set out as part of *urishik* (“our”) identity through use of the *pat’ang* (as introduced in Chapter 4); that is, the national character, disposition, and

temperament.<sup>5</sup> Note that North Korean texts focus on *pat'ang* rather than *topoi* as the defining principle.

### Song constructions

In operas, new songs come in two types, as core and supporting themes. Both give identification to character, and this contributes to the ability to lift them from an opera and generate performances by the masses or by noted singers on festival stages for the masses. As this happens, the identification with *pat'ang* maintains the ideological content of lyrics, and it does so in two ways. First, character is assigned to the actor, much as Ch'oe Haeok in "The Flower Girl" was elevated to hero status from being a poor farmer's daughter, or as Rim Ch'unyŏng, a railroad inspector, similarly gained fame and was awarded merit artist status for taking leading roles in both "Oh! Tell" and "Mount Kūmgang."<sup>6</sup> Second, songs become building blocks that are used in films, mass games, and orchestral and instrumental compositions. In this sense, it is the seeds that are regarded as essential. The result is that audience familiarity with song lyrics means new works do not need to reference lyrics but must always maintain and foreground the song melody.

The core song for "Sea of Blood," "*P'i padaga*" (a.k.a. "*P'i pada ŭi norae*") introduces a problem of attribution. Officially, it was written during the colonial period when Kim Il Sung wrote and oversaw the performance of the play on which the opera is based; hence no composer attribution is given. The same applies with the core song of "The Flower Girl" and with other foundational songs in operas and other works given the "revolutionary" tag. But the melodic foundation for "Sea of Blood" is actually a different song, "I Will Keep My Red Spirit Single-Heartedly,"<sup>7</sup> which was composed by Sŏng Tongch'un for the 1969 film on which the opera is based. The importance of this song, given in Notation 6.1, is considerable, and it is routinely given pride of place among film songs.<sup>8</sup> There is a close relationship between this and the "Sea of Blood" core song, but although Sŏng's melody appears foundational, chronologically it is the song supposedly created in the 1930s that must be. Sŏng's contribution is a *chŏlga*, offering two four-bar phrases, each dividing into two equal parts. In the opera, his song opens Act 5, where Mother is about to be released from prison. It is reprised in the second movement of the symphony based on the opera (Kim Ch'ŏewŏn 1991, 18; Yu 2007, 98). The core song, though, develops from this, even though on first hearing

Andante
mf

Ch'öl'ch'ang sog - e

kosaeng ha - shin

ö-mö-ni-rül mo - shi - go,

Param pu - nün

san'ön-dög - ül

nöm - ö kam - ni - da.

A - dük han,

Chö - san nö - mö,

mf

Palg-ün hae - p'it

tta sa - ro - i,

Pi - ch'ö'chum - ni - da.

**Notation 6.1** “*Ilp'yöündanshim pulgün maüm kanjikkammida*/I Keep My Red Spirit Single-Heartedly” (1969) by Söng Tongch'un, as used in the film “*P'i Pada*/Sea of Blood.”  
Source: *Yönghwa norae 1000-kokchip* 1993, 59.

it can sound new, vacillating around two short leitmotifs, the first a question and the second an answer. Burnett (2016, 400) labels leitmotifs of the sort found in this song “signature motifs.” Its question motif takes the rising opening of Söng’s original song (c-c-f-g- $\text{ab}$ ) and develops a substitute (c-d $\flat$ -c-f-g-c’), adding a turn (c-d $\flat$ -c) to enhance character and identity, and an octave leap that strengthens the contour (c-c’). A resolution onto  $\text{bb}$  is then used in moments of calm, falling from the high c’. The answer motif adapts the cadential second measure of the original (g-c-g-f), resisting the initial fall of a fifth but adding strength and variety through a number of variant incarnations: c-c-c-c-b $\flat$ -a $\flat$ -e $\flat$ , d $\flat$ -d $\flat$ -d $\flat$ -d $\flat$ -c-b $\flat$ , e $\flat$ -e $\flat$ -e $\flat$ -e $\flat$ -d $\flat$ -c-a $\flat$ -g, and more. Note that these melodic contours descend from those identified as characteristic in folk songs.<sup>9</sup> Still other songs are assembled from elsewhere, including folk songs and the lullaby “*Chajangga*.”

“The Flower Girl” is based on an eight-bar *chölgä* that takes the opera title for itself. Again, this was supposedly composed and sung during the colonial period, rather than being new for either the film or the opera. It is shown in Notation 6.2:

Slow, laboured *mp*  $\text{♩} = 66$

Kkot sa-shi - o, kkot sa-shi - o, ö - yö - ppün ppal - kan kkot,

Hyang-gi-rop - ko pit - kal-ko - un a - rüm da - un ppal - kan kkot.

An - nün öm - ma, yak ku-ha - ryö, chöngsöngtam - a ka - kkunkkot,

Kkot sa-shi - o, kkot sa-shi - o, i - kkot i - kkot ppal - kan kkot.

**Notation 6.2** “*Kkot p'anün yöja/The Flower Girl*” (1972), from *Chosön ümak chönjip* 3 (1983): 119.



Buy flowers, buy flowers, these pretty red flowers,  
 Fragrant and beautiful flowers, red flowers.  
 I am selling these flowers to get medicine for my sick mother,  
 Buy flowers, buy flowers, these flowers, these flowers, red flowers.

The most celebrated *pangch'ang*, “Spring Comes Every Year,” is a development of this song, sharing the division into two eight-bar segments, the melodic outline of the first two bars, and the concluding cadential pattern. It replaces the 9/8 of “The Flower Girl” with a 3/4 meter. Listen to both, with “Oh My Darling, Clementine” in your mind, and the relationship will be apparent. Other versions and developments appear throughout the opera, achieving distance but harnessing the same melodic components; Kim Ch'oe-wŏn (1991, 62–64) cites five: “*Marŭn namuga chiedo kkotp'il ttae itta/* The Time When a Dry Tree Is Not Enough,” “*Nega ŏpshi naega saramuŏsŭl harya/*Without You I Cannot Live,” and “*Ch'ongsŏngimyŏn toredo kkot p'indadŏni/*At the Dispensary, Flowers Are Not Enough” from Act 3, and “*Saranghanŭn maldŭrŭl tugogan ŏmoni/*Mother's Words of Love Remain for Life” and “*Ribyŏl ŭi shigagŭn tagaonŭnde/*At the Time of Parting, Promise to Return” from Act 5. Another distinctive song, “*Kŏmŭn kurŭm mollyŏgo pŏn'gae ch'inŭndae/*Black Clouds Gather and Lightning Strikes,” also generates much material, particularly from its own signature motif, which is the descending and resolving melody of its fourth line.

The overture to the 1988 national opera “*Ch'unhyangjŏn*” starts with the most famous song of any *p'ansori* or *ch'anggŭk* version of the widely known folk tale, “*Sarangga/Song of Love*.” Or, rather, an eight-bar arrangement of a rewritten song, played by unison national *tanso* vertical flute and *chŏdae* transverse flute, Western flute, clarinet, and electric keyboard, with the reformed *ongnyugŭm* harp zither and *yanggŭm* dulcimer and the Western vibraphone filling out the texture. Notation 6.3 shows the vibraphone, electric keyboard, *ongnyugŭm*, and *yanggŭm* parts. The orchestration is typical and reflects a comment in Kim Jong Il's *On the Art of Music*: “When national string instruments . . . are used, the Western harp can be dispensed with” (1991, 446). Hence the *ongnyugŭm* fills in the texture with harp-like arpeggios and glissandi, while the *yanggŭm* doubles the keyboard in playing the melody, in unison, with a constant tremolo. Nothing detracts from the melody, and the vibraphone merely adds rising figures that fill out bars, while keyboard and *ongnyugŭm* harmonies provide support, adding filigree arpeggios only when the melody is paused. Somewhat contradictorily to this, though, Kim's treatise states that “it is preferable to refrain from using electronic instruments” (1991, 447), but it is the keyboard in Notation 6.3 that, with the dulcimer, carries the melody. “Song of Love” comes in its new but unsullied

A little slow *mp*

vibraphone *mp*

elec. keyboard *mp* 8<sup>va</sup>

ongnyugüm/  
harp zither *mp*

yanggüm/  
dulcimer *mp*

**Notation 6.3** Act 1 prelude to “*Ch’unhyangjön*/ Story of ‘Spring Fragrance’” (1988), with the melody of “*Sarangga*/Song of Love,” showing vibraphone, electric keyboard, *ongnyugüm* harp-zither, and *yanggüm* dulcimer. Excerpt from full score (1991, 10–11).

form at the end of Act 2 in “*Ch’unhyangjön*.” As a lavish dance fills the stage, it is first given in duet by Ch’unhyang and Mongnyong, then, as the two lovers embrace in undying love, an offstage chorus takes over, allowing the lovers to act out their scene (Notation 6.4):

Love, love, my love, Love, love, my love,  
Where does it burn? It burns my breast, my beautiful love!

The song returns in a further orchestral version, which provides the core of the finale, played by both Western and national instruments. Although the semiquaver/sixteenth tone mordants that mark the articulation of “love” (*sarang*) relate to traditional instrumental rather than vocal ornamentation, this is far from *p’ansori*. Notation 6.5 offers an excerpt from a 1976 recording

Andante *mp*

The musical score is written on a single staff with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 4/4 time signature. The tempo is marked 'Andante' and the dynamic is 'mp'. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes, with some measures containing beamed eighth notes. The lyrics are written below the staff, aligned with the notes. The lyrics are: 'Sa - rang, sa - rang, sa - rang - i - ya, Lo - ve, Lo - ve, My lo - ve, My lo - ve, A - rum - da - un nae sa - rang - a! My beau - ti - ful lo - ve!'.

Sa - rang, sa - rang, sa - rang - i - ya,  
Lo - ve, Lo - ve, My lo - ve, My lo - ve,  
A - rum - da - un nae sa - rang - a!  
My beau - ti - ful lo - ve!

Kü ö-di-e p'i-yön-na,  
Where does it burn,  
Ka-süm sog-e p'i-yöne,  
It burns in my breast,  
A-rüm-da-un nae sa-rang-a!  
My beau-ti-ful lo-ve!

**Notation 6.4** “*Saranggal*/Song of Love,” Act 2 of “*Chunhyangjŏn*/Story of ‘Spring Fragrance’” (1988). Excerpt from full score (1991, 174–75).

Chinyangjo ♩. = 48

First system of musical notation in G major (one sharp) and 4/8 time. The melody is written on a single staff. The lyrics are: Sa-rang - sa - rang, Lo-ve lo - ve, Nae sa-rang - i - ya, My lo-ve, [vocables] hô-dung - dung.

Second system of musical notation. The melody continues on a single staff. The lyrics are: Nae sa-rang i - ya. My lo-ve... Kwang han ru-sô han pôn po-go, Sãm hia-ji maeng kip' ün sa-rang.

Third system of musical notation. The melody continues on a single staff. The lyrics are: Hạ-wôl sam gyông pam-i Hach' - i sô - rin chông hûi.

**Notation 6.5** “*Sarangga/Song of Love*,” as performed by Kim Solhûi (1917–1995), from *Han'guk ūmak* 15 (1977). Used with permission of the National Gugak Center.

by the most celebrated female *p'ansori* singer of the twentieth century, Kim Sohüi (1917–1994).<sup>10</sup> She was, and in South Korea still is, considered authoritative both because she grew up in Namwŏn, the town in which the story is set, and because she had an outstanding pedigree, following a long and distinguished lineage of famed singers, from Kim Ch'aeman, to Song Maŋgap, to her teacher, Chŏng Chŏngnyŏl.<sup>11</sup> Her “Song of Love” began in a very slow tempo, in the 18/8 *chinyangjo* rhythmic cycle, with each six-beat measure marking a phrase, and the downbeat mirroring drum percussion upbeats on the last two beats of each cycle. This has no place within *juche*-oriented populism. And, rather than North Korea's required lyricism, Kim uses accents, tonal falls, elaboration, and vibrato on low tones to heighten emotion.

In the 1988 national opera, one song written for the earlier *ch'anggŭk* revivals by Ri Myŏnsang and Shin Yŏngchŏl (b.1927) is prominently retained, possibly in deference to the much-lauded Ri, suggesting that the opera's creators learned from earlier revivals rather than starting with a blank canvas. Given in Notation 6.6, this is the second song in Act 1, “*Kkot norae*/Song of Flowers,” where supporting arpeggios on national instruments create a rich texture for a vocal part still reminiscent of the lilting southwestern folk songs of the past, and evoking, albeit faintly, an earlier phase of cultural production:

Flowers bloom in spring, flowers bloom when spring comes,  
My heart throbs as flowers bend and sway in the spring wind.  
[When going to] Seoul, never forget this feeling of the bunches of flowers,  
Bunches, bunches, a thousand ten thousand bunches, bloom in this  
dream of spring.

The other inclusion of note, as a counterpoint to “Song of Love” but also highly celebrated both by traditional singers and aficionados of *p'ansori*, is “*Ibyŏlga*/Song of Parting.” But the opera rewrites this as a simple melody supported by textbook diatonic harmony—I-I/V-V/IV-VII/III-II/I-I—removing any memories of the song of yore.

### Portable songs

*Chŏlga* and *pangch'ang* enable people to sing along, thereby internalizing the seeds they contain. They can be recast for daily life, played on festival stages, and remade as background music for dramas, films, mass spectacles, and more. With the seed in the lyrics imbibed, instrumental and orchestral music based

Slightly slow *mp*

The musical score is written on three staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#), and a 12/8 time signature. The tempo and dynamics are marked 'Slightly slow' and 'mp'. The melody is written in a single voice line. The lyrics are in English and a non-Latin script. The second staff continues the melody and lyrics. The third staff concludes the piece with a final cadence. The lyrics are: Pompa - ram - e kkot mul - gyöl, Söläe-i-nün-i ka-süm. Han - song-i kkos - song - i - e, Pomkkum-i p'i - yö-na - ne.

Kkos - i p'i - yö Flo - wers bl - oom  
Pom - i wa - sö Spring has come  
in' - ga, it is,  
Söläe-i-nün-i ka-süm.  
Han - song-i kkos - song - i - e,  
Pomkkum-i p'i - yö-na - ne.

Pom pa - ram - e k kot mul - gyöl, Söllae-i-nün-i ka-süm. Han - song-i k kos - song - i - e,

i maŭm - ŭl tam - a - bo - ni,      Song-i song-i      ch'ŏn - man song-i,      Pomkkum-i p'i - yŏ-na - ne.

Notation 6.6 “Kkot norae/Song of Flowers,” in “*Chunhyangjŏn*/Story of ‘Spring Fragrance’” (1988). Excerpt from full score (1991, 35–36).

on song melodies keep the seed intact. This is demonstrated on a wordless album titled, obliquely, “*Haengsa ūmak chŏnjip*/Function Music,” published on CD in 1995 as volume 34 in the venerable *Songs of Korea* series (catalogue number KM-C-234). On it, a military band plays a sequence of pieces, mostly arrangements of songs, in a labored and serene way. Starting with “Song of General Kim Il Sung,” it continues with two songs linking father to son, “*Kim Chŏngil tongji ūi norae*/Song of Dear Comrade Kim Jong Il” and “*Chidoja tongji ūi mansu mugangŭl ch’ugwŏn hamnida*/Long Life and Good Health to You Dear Leader.”

On a visit to Pyongyang in 2000, I discovered that the album’s purpose was for use at Kim Il Sung’s mausoleum. The music, together with the timing of individual pieces and the (missing) lyrics of individual songs, matched how visitors experienced Kim’s former palace—a palace that his son had enlarged to create a sufficiently massive mausoleum worthy of his father.<sup>12</sup> The album’s music is used to choreograph the theater, a testament to the “perpetual ritual state” (Ryang 2012, 21–24). One enters, and a hush falls as staff tell visitors to be silent. One steps through liquid disinfectant and through X-ray machines as the first song is played. One joins a moving walkway on which one is required to stand: the first song gives way to the second and third, and the prohibition against walking ensures the timing of the pieces is correct. Waiting to enter the palace proper, one hears “*Urinŭn ch’inwidae tolgyŏktae*/We Are the Bodyguards and Shock Brigades.” Entering, “*Hwanyŏnggok*/Welcome Music” and “*Sayŏlgok*/Parade Music” are piped through speakers. Queueing outside the room containing Kim Il Sung’s embalmed cadaver, a reprise of “Song of General Kim Il Sung” plays. In the antechamber, the sequence is “Patriotic Song” and then “*Yŏngchŏpkok*/Reception Music,” while entry into the inner sanctum and the required circling and bowing to the cadaver are accompanied by “*Moksanggok*/Silent Prayer Music” and “*Chudogok*/Memorial Music.” The next room contains a statue of Kim, and “*Hwahwan chinjŏnggok*/Music for Laying Wreaths” plays as flower baskets are placed before the statue. The next has a monument to Kim’s victory in the Korean War. Shuffling slowly out, “The Internationale” precedes “*Sŭngni ūi yŏlbyŏngshik*/Victorious Parade,” “*Yugyŏktae haengjin’gok*/March of the Guerilla Army,” and, finally, “*Tangshini ŏpsŭmyŏn chogukto ŏpta*/No Motherland without You.” From guerrilla to utopian dream, from father to son, from international socialism to national independence, the songs-without-words intricately choreograph the pillars on which the state has been built.

### Opera as ideology, and opera as spectacle

If Korean tradition, as well as Soviet and Chinese influences, impacted the development of revolutionary operas, so did film culture. This is clear from the first opera to be produced, “Sea of Blood,” which began as a film. “The Fate of a Self-Defence Corps Man” also began as a film, while “The Flower Girl” was developed alongside its film equivalent. In operas, filmed backdrops allow real scenery to be captured, and the fades to dark between scenes utilize a common film technique. Although the Japanese had used mobile cinemas in their Manchurian colony, operated by the South Manchurian Railway (Pease 2001, 99–100), it was the Soviets who impressed on North Koreans the utility of film: prints and projection facilities could be taken around the country, avoiding the costs of transporting a full artistic troupe. Lenin had remarked that cinema was the most important of all contemporary arts, and in 1924 Stalin added that film was the greatest means of mass agitation available.<sup>13</sup> This was not just the case in the socialist world, since mobile cinemas were used across the world until recently; they were in use in Britain and the United States into the late 1960s, and in 2000 I encountered one still touring villages in Cuba.

Revolutionary operas supplemented film as ideological tools. They could be filmed, and prints could then be distributed around the country in much the same way as films. But operas began a shift deemed impossible with film, whereby spectators became part of the spectacle; this is the rationale for portable songs. By introducing a focus on simple, memorable songs articulated through leitmotifs containing ideological seeds as well as myriad subsidiary messages, operas became spectacles *of* and *for* the people. In this, they fit the twentieth-century’s mass utopia dreamscape, which Susan Buck-Morss reminds us drove industrial modernization in both capitalist and socialist states (2002, ix). But operas also highlighted the tension between artistry and participation, and efforts to overcome this came as staged operas grew ever larger until, in 1982, “Song of Glory” had a cast of 5,000.

The rationale becomes less opaque when operas are positioned alongside mass games and mass festivals—mass spectacles. Across the globe, mass spectacles fall into one of two overlapping types. One links to competitive sports, such as the Olympics or the soccer World Cup (for which, think England 1966, since this was the first quadrennial event globalized by the power of television; Tomlinson and Young 2006, 8). The second symbolizes collective unity and runs from the German Friedrich Jahn’s (1778–1852) *Turnverein* and the Czech Miroslav Tyrš’s (1832–1884) *Sokols*



(Falcons), through Dalcrozian *eurythmie* to the massive group displays of Mary Wigman and Rudolf Laban that proved vital to the opening ceremony of the 1936 Berlin Olympics Games. The first type requires specialism and high levels of skill, giving center stage to super-human abilities and achievements, and is primarily urban, while the second signals a utopian collective and often harks back to a supposedly egalitarian past while simultaneously claiming to occupy the popular ground. Jahn's aim, reflecting on the weakness of Germanic people after the Napoleonic wars, was to "create an exemplary community that would show the rest of the world how an ideal society should look" (Roubal 2003, 4–5). Harnessed as *Korpurkultur*, in Germany as well as Scandinavia at the beginning of the twentieth century, massive group displays showed off pure and chaste bodies (and minds), a unified community that was, certainly by the time of the 1938 rallies in Nuremberg, ready to fight in defense of the cause. Harnessed by Stalin in the Soviet Union, mass spectacles took on both the carnivalesque, as in the Gorky Park celebrations in the mid- and late 1930s, and the nationalistic, as in Red Square processions and parades. From Moscow, spectacles spread to Soviet satellite states. Mass spectacles create and use national symbols, whether in the Soviet Union (Clark 1981, 2011), in Assad's Syria (Wedeen 1999), or Karimov's Uzbekistan (Adams 2010).<sup>14</sup>

In the nineteenth century, the concept of spectacle developed through the panorama, popularized in rotundas that immersed spectators in the center of 360-degree installations in London, Berlin, The Hague, Lucerne, Atlanta, and beyond. Immersion also characterized Parisian arcades, places of consumption lacking windows to the outside, where, as explored by Charles Fourier, spectators were drawn in to an alternative reality that removed them from daily life. Where a novel or a painting had borders, panoramas and arcades did not. Walter Benjamin, writing in the 1930s and taking forward the exploration of arcades when they were already in decline, added moving film and its temples—cinemas—to the borderless reality (Kang 2014, 150–201). And, as theater groups tried to break the "fourth wall," they, too, sought to involve spectators in the spectacle (Rayner 1993; Grotowski 2002; Brine and Kiedan 2007; Freshwater 2009). The end result ought to be something akin to Michel Foucault's panopticon in which, in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), spectators are permanently observed performing within the spectacle. This is the all-seeing Big Brother of Orwell's *1984*, or, if you are a fan of the American film actor Jim Carrey, a kind of *Truman Show*.<sup>15</sup> In North Korea, as Sonia Ryang (2012, 50ff) notes, nobody can escape the all-pervasive presence of Kim Il

Sung; he permanently observes every detail of the theater of daily life from his portraits hung in every household and every public building.

Revolutionary operas are claimed to be a comprehensive art form, mixing theater, music, dance, lyrics, and staging. It is this all-embracing nature that creates the spectacle. Lisa Burnett (2016) explores them as a total art form, allying Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*<sup>16</sup> to Kim Jong Il. Following Boris Groys's observation that totalitarian states require "total art,"<sup>17</sup> she draws a line from the composer Richard Wagner to Moscow in its pre-Zhdanovian years, through Beijing in its eight model works, to Pyongyang. In Wagner's early writings, *Gesamtkunstwerk* represented the *Volk*, the people, involving them in creation and performance, much as Kim later argued that art came from the people. In Wagner's operas, though, the people gave way to the exceptional artist, the *prima donna*,<sup>18</sup> as heroes embedded utopian equality but, in a Stakhanovite (or Kim Hoeilian) way, rose above the mundane mediocrity of the everyday in the then industrializing world. Burnett outlines nine elements that she considers characteristic of *Gesamtkunstwerk*: the integration of many art forms, strong associations with the messages (that is, in North Korea, the seeds), self-designation as revolutionary and future-oriented, grandiosity, the use of plots that are mythic or legendary, being inspirational or redemptive, featuring characters that are archetypal, using music constructed around recurrent and detachable melodies, and being of/by/for the people (2016, 12–33).

In North Korea, adding to Burnett's list, myths and legends are made real in the hagiography of the leaders. Archetypal characters come to life as they are mediated by named actors, and ethnonationalist concerns are theorized as *juche* replaces Dalhausian aesthetics. The message becomes paramount, heroines become a mix of the character to be emulated and the embodiment of perfection, and artists are no longer considered individual creator-geniuses but as low-profile servants of the regime. To vamp along the lines of Victor Turner's *The Anthropology of Performance* (1986, 81), a man or a woman may be a creative animal, but, in Pyongyang, his or her creativity or performative nature can no longer be reflexive, nor dare he or she reveal himself/herself to himself/herself. Revolutionary operas are a representation of a utopian reality, even though the reality is far from utopian, merging the everyday with the exceptional. While theater normally functions as a mirror of life, the theater of North Korea exceeds the reality of life. It must do so to establish *clivage* (theatricality; Féral 2002), as much as does the tourist gaze (Urry 1990), but, with the fourth wall broken, the binary between reality and imagination collapses, extending the theater into the audience. Thereby, as

the audience becomes part of the spectacle, the culture of mutual surveillance is reinforced, and the seeds of songs, constantly repeated, as well as the operas themselves, become part of daily life.<sup>19</sup> Suk-Young Kim (2010, 183–88) convincingly argues that what we observe in North Korea is theater: the theater of kindergartens and schools shown to tourists is part of the theater of Pyongyang; the theater of Pyongyang, with tidy, clean streets and squares, and its sparse traffic constantly controlled by crisply uniformed female wardens, is part of a larger theater that forms the country; and from the late 1960s until his death, the director and producer of what was staged was Kim Jong Il. Hence, Kim oversaw the production of revolutionary operas.

May 2001 marked the fifteen hundredth performance of "Sea of Blood," according to the *Pyongyang Times*, and as I write, revolutionary operas are approaching their fiftieth anniversary. This suggests that audiences tolerate, and perhaps accept, the way that operas shape everyday life. For this to be so, operas, and performance arts more generally, must rely on a combination of artistry and engagement—again, they are both *for* the people and *of* the people. Artistry explains why the new Soviet citizen of the 1920s was deemed to need aesthetic molding by exposure to high art, and why Benjamin concluded that a spectator needed to be jolted from repetitive sameness by artistry (or violence<sup>20</sup>) if he or she was to remain attentive to the message. Artistry made education important to the early North Korean state, and, reflecting this, the state recast the Soviet emblem of the hammer and sickle by adding a third component, the calligrapher's brush, fusing artists and writers to peasants and workers.<sup>21</sup> Engagement, in contrast, explains why spectators are made part of the spectacle, so that each opera becomes their reality. Doing so through songs is akin to why Christian congregations chant liturgy, psalms, and hymns as they internalize doctrine. My contention is that where films concentrate on artistry and mass spectacles on the participation of all involved, revolutionary operas seek a balance between the two. In other words, operas exist

in an ambivalent dimension created by the dual axes of the fictional utopian world and theater and the real world that was supposed to look like the ideal world theater fabricated. [They] were both the product of utopian imagination and the producers of the real city. (Suk-Young Kim 2010, 89)

Ideology, embedded in opera through seeds, is the means by which the illusion—of the panorama, of the arcade, of the theater—becomes reality.

Operas therefore mix the non-everyday with the everyday, and their music blends Romantic pastiche with Western functional harmony; indeed, the irony of socialist realism, in North Korea as in the Soviet Union, is its reliance on the artistic language of the Enlightenment. This is an issue of taste; even when political leaders know little about art, they know what they like.<sup>22</sup> But, with ideology placed above art, and because the reality in which people live is not a utopia, revolutionary operas create only a monochromatic, repetitive, supra-reality of what has been and what will come only if people remain faithful to the party. As in Wedeen's take on Assad's Syria, North Korean operas help foreclose possibilities for political thought and action (1999, 156). But they do so by entering what Benjamin might have dubbed a one-way street; to hijack former Russian Minister of Nationalities Valery Tishkov's discussion of socialist realism, the rigid tyranny of party ideology and collective censorship creates inertia (1997, xiv). Hence, to escape this, the next stage in spectacle generation moved on from opera, and from the specialist end of artistic creation, to a more utopian collective production, making high skill levels seem ever more ordinary. So, with Tishkov and Benjamin in mind, my next chapter moves to mass spectacles and, underpinning them, dance. It remains questionable, though, whether after the short three-year period in which revolutionary operas were produced, Pyongyang had found a way to escape what had been created.

## From Spectacles to Dance

This chapter is deliberately somewhat back-to-front, in order to open by continuing the discussion that concluded Chapter 6. I first introduce, as an example of mass spectacles, an extraordinary spectacle of 50,000 people dancing in a Pyongyang square. My trajectory is then set, and the chapter ends with an overview of dance in North Korea, after shining a spotlight on the dancer and choreographer Ch'oe Sŏnghŭi, who was significant to the twentieth-century staging of dance in both Korean states, and to the evolution of dance in North Korea. Before that, following a discussion of the Pyongyang square event, I offer a brief exploration of mass spectacles—a whole volume could, of course, reasonably be devoted to such spectacles. And, to bridge to dance practice, I introduce the alphabet-based *chamo p'yogibŏp* notation system, which, although claimed to be both unique and more comprehensive than any comparable Western system for dance, was designed in North Korea to serve not just the choreographers of amateur and professional dance, but also the needs of mass spectacle pedagogues.

### Watching the 50,000

To celebrate Kim Il Sung's eighty-eighth birthday, 50,000 people danced in Kim Il Sung Square on April 15, 2000. They were described as the *ch'ŏngsŏnyŏn*, a term that usually implies the youth, but which was explained to me as signifying unmarried men and women in their twenties. The square had once been known as Stalin Square but, flanked by government ministries as well as the People's Grand Study House (the National Library), the National Art Museum, and the National History Museum, it had long since been renamed Kim Il Sung Square. Today, it is the major site for North Korea's festivals and parades, and is used for the showcase displays of marching troops and military hardware that are regularly beamed across the world. Kim, the Eternal President, had died six years before this dance event, but a portrait of him

hung prominently from a ministry building on the eastern side. Opposite it, on the western side, hung portraits of Marx and Lenin—these were later destined for removal<sup>1</sup> when a portrait of Kim Jong Il was added. Explored when empty of dancers and soldiers, the square is covered in markings that plot a "trapezoidal graph" (Kim, Thak, and Kim 2002, 11), permanently ready for the next event. Victory Street (Sŭngni-ro) bisects the square, once known as Stalin Street but renamed in commemoration of the official claim that Kim defeated the American aggressors who had initiated the Korean War. During the mass dance event, the street remained open, and every few minutes a trolley bus or smoke-belching truck trundled across, dividing the crowds of dancers in two and providing an effective reminder of the official line that the North Korean revolution never stops.

Across the Taedong River to the south,<sup>2</sup> the Juche Tower formed a backdrop, lit up by darting spotlights whose operators had banks of filters to create constantly changing beams of color. The Dear Leader, Kim Jong Il, had overseen the tower's construction in 1982 to celebrate Kim Il Sung's seventieth birthday. He ordered 25,550 stone bricks to be arranged in 18 layers on two sides and 17 layers on the other two, because his father had lived for 25,550 days across 70 years (70, made up by adding the layers of stones on the four sides together:  $18+17+18+17$ ). The stone bricks weighed a total of 22,000 tons, because Kim, within the revisionist history of the time, first theorized juche ideology in his childhood, 22,000 days before his seventieth birthday and shortly after his mother led him from Pyongyang into Manchurian exile. The square forms the northwestern corner of a geometric pattern cementing father to son as the first and second leaders, with the Juche Tower at the southwest. At the northeast corner sits Mansu Hill (Mansudae). On the hill stands the sixtieth birthday present from the Dear Leader to his father known as the Grand Monument, a massive, 22-meter bronze statue of Kim Il Sung, placed in front of the Museum of the Revolution and flanked by 280 bronze reliefs. It is reported that when first erected the statue was covered in gold leaf, but this was deemed too ostentatious (Cha 2012, 79). Note that in April 2012 the statue was remodeled and moved slightly, so that it could be joined by an equivalent statue of the Dear Leader, Kim Jong Il. In the southeastern corner of the grid stands the Monument to Party Founding, with its 216 white stones celebrating Kim Jong Il.<sup>3</sup>

In 2000 I was one of a small audience of around 200 diplomats, dignitaries, aid workers, and foreign musicians and dancers who watched the mass dance; the foreign performers were in Pyongyang to participate in the annual

Spring Friendship Arts Festival. We stood patiently on the steps of the Grand People's Study House as our breath formed a mist due to the unseasonable evening chill. Our tickets announced that we had been individually invited by the collective *chǒngsomyŏn*. We were the only audience, a miniscule group compared to the number of dancers. To be fair, though, the dance was broadcast live on state television, and its recording was destined to become a filler for future use. We were told each dancer was wearing a new outfit—somber suits for men and brightly-colored *chosŏn ot* for women—gifts bestowed by the state in honor of Kim Il Sung's birthday. The Spring Festival had been held each April since 1982, again, to honor Kim's birthday. It aimed to be international, and North Korea's diplomatic missions actively recruited participants, although, in keeping with Soviet-style events from the recent past, most of those persuaded to come were from former socialist and non-aligned states.<sup>4</sup>

I had arrived in Pyongyang that morning. Met at the airport and given flowers, I was driven to Mansu Hill and instructed to place the flowers in front of Kim Il Sung's statue. A television camera whirled, and for the evening news I was transformed into one of the many foreigners reported to travel to Pyongyang to pay respects to the Eternal President. That surreal start to my visit became stranger still as I joined the small audience in the evening; it turned even more surreal when we were ushered forward to join the dancers at the end of the performance to merge, uncomfortably, into the spectacle.

The 50,000 dancers were arranged in a grid, fanning out to the distant corners of the square, to buildings on its sides, and to the riverbank. They danced for almost an hour to a succession of songs performed by well-known vocalists such as Jo Chong Mi and Jon Hye Yong,<sup>5</sup> merit artists and people's artists showcased on myriad state-sanctioned albums. The singers stood to the front of a temporary stage erected in the square's center, in front of the large uniformed orchestra and choir of the Mansudae Art Troupe, the same troupe that had been responsible for the first performance of "The Flower Girl" revolutionary opera 28 years earlier. And between the stage and the steps of the Grand People's Study House where we stood, acrobats and professional dancers performed dazzling routines. The eyes of the invited audience were attracted to the center, but as the mass of dancers filled the periphery of our vision, the impression was—and we were repeatedly told—that we were watching youthful citizens, workers, and teachers from across the city, brought together for a major celebration. At the end, it was the youthful *chǒngsomyŏn* who rushed to us, taking us in their arms and coaxing us to join the dance as the professional performers in the center melted away.

### Spectacles, calisthenics, gymnastics

The 50,000 dancers fused together, creating an image of a smoothly operating Engelian or Leninist machine in which each individual dancer was a cog, joined to their mates around the circumference of a wheel, each wheel meshing seamlessly with neighboring wheels on all sides. Ermanno Furlanis, an Italian training Pyongyang chefs how to make pizza, was in the audience. He was duly impressed:

Here was the very heart of the nation, a place which had been carefully designed . . . with the special purpose of enthralling and bewitching the populace: a perfectly functional masterpiece of celebratory art. Even we succumbed to its hypnotic effect. In the center they set up an immense dais with a band and choir. . . . It was the anniversary of some victory. All around . . . in perfectly regular squares of 300 or 400 people, the population of Pyongyang had dutifully assembled for the dance. . . . And then the dancing began.

First the squares formed into circles and then flared out into stars. I felt a shiver down my spine in front of the precision of their movements: rarely had I experienced such powerful emotions. [We were invited] to join the crowd. Delighted by the invitation we accepted. We clasped hands with a ring of dancers and had a wonderful time while they playfully reproached us for getting all the steps wrong.<sup>6</sup>

North Korea is known for mass spectacles. The official account has it that Kim Il Sung created the first, the “Flower Gymnastics,” in 1930 (Kim, Thak, and Kim 2002, 6; Han Kyöngja 2018, 38). A British documentary, *A State of Mind* (2004),<sup>7</sup> brings that date forward to 1946, as does Lisa Burnett (2013, 5, 2016, 299), to when celebrations were held to mark the first anniversary of liberation from Japanese colonial control. Although I have found no documentary evidence to support such a date, 1946 would mark, albeit roughly, the time when Soviets began to impact Pyongyang’s cultural scene. However, many Koreans at the time would have been familiar with how factories and schools throughout the Japanese empire adopted group calisthenics in the 1930s, much along the lines of Nazi Germany and supported by a daily radio broadcast (for which, see Lo 1990, 21; Tansman 2010, 127), so models were in place, waiting to be transformed. Since then, North Korean spectacles have included “*Haebang üi norae*/Song of Independence” (1955); “The



Era of the Korea Worker's Party" (1961); "Prosperous Juche Korea" (1987);<sup>8</sup> the children-focused response to Seoul's hosting of the Olympic Games "40-Years of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea" (1988);<sup>9</sup> "Ever-Victorious Workers Party of Korea" (2000); the many "Arirang" festivals (2002–2013, 2015, 2018); and, in December 2018, "The Glorious Country."<sup>10</sup> On December 29, 2018, the *Pyongyang Times* gushed how, in respect to "The Glorious Country," "foreign viewers lavished praise . . . saying 'It is the best masterpiece of the world,'" and, "the fact that such an artwork exists is just the pride of the human world." "Arirang," however, beginning on April 26, 2002, and initially conceived partly as a spoiler to the quadrennial soccer World Cup that was to be held the next month in South Korea and Japan, has drawn the most attention.

Distinctions can be made between the calisthenics of the April 2000 mass dance and mass gymnastics. Kim Jong Il justified doing so in a critique of rehearsals for "Prosperous Juche Korea": "The major shortcoming of the work is that it resembles a dance and art work." If music were allowed to generate such an event, "the mass gymnastics performance may become an art performance. This is not good" ("On further developing mass gymnastics," 1997 [1987], 11, 18). Since seed theory (*chongjaron*) required music, and art more generally, to be subservient to ideological messages, and much as a libretto was composed before the music of revolutionary operas, in mass gymnastics, gymnastics and the thematic story is said to be determined before suitable music is chosen. Moreover, "mass gymnastics . . . makes the audience feel invigorated by means of forceful and vigorous gymnastic movements. If mass gymnastics is put on an artistic basis, it will be deprived of its forcefulness and thus lose this excellent attribute" (Kim, Thak, and Kim 2002, 12). Rhythm and timing, though, are readily governed by music, so to an extent the clarity of message relies on the careful selection of songs, with or without their lyrics. Hence, "Gymnasts . . . cannot produce a clear ideological and emotional portrayal. Music, with its . . . rich artistic language and ability to express emotions, overcomes this" (28). The music for mass gymnastics and dance performances, then, must be built from songs, and the song sequence is required to showcase variety, lest the whole spectacle "lack novelty and feel monotonous" (29).<sup>11</sup> Kim was prone to critiquing song choices: "The song is slow and crooning, so it does not fit the mood of the scene of celebrations . . . [which] to be effective, needs merry and lively music," or, to "delineate the militant Party, forceful and militant music should be selected" (1997 [1987], 10).

In addition to gymnastics and music, spectacles involve a third component: backdrops. In Pyongyang, these began to be developed from 1955, although the Soviets had them earlier. Where operas use film projections to provide fluid backdrops, spectacles use thousands of children, each with a book of card pages, to "represent the theme of the work and bring the gymnasts into relief" (Kim, Thak, and Kim 2002, 20). The children create constantly changing gigantic mosaics,<sup>12</sup> directed, from behind the audience, by flag-waving conductors and electronic boards. Each child initially had 10 card pages, but by 2000 this had become 170 pages, supplemented by decorated umbrellas (which could be opened and closed to suggest twinkling stars), bellows and large sheets (to create waves and shimmers), sticks, torches, and more. Kim Jong Il was particularly intolerant if an imperfect image of Kim Il Sung appeared: "The Great Leader's image must be given on the backdrop in a more respectful appearance" (1997 [1987], 7). The skill required of those making the pixelated backdrop meant that they, like gymnasts, endured extended and often painful training. But by the time of "*Arirang*," because of the expansive backdrops, the audience occupied barely a third of the seats. In filmed recordings, broadcast regularly on television and distributed on VCDs, viewers take in the panorama but are also taken into the spectacle as cameras zoom in on ranks of gymnasts and dancers. The audience is never filmed; as with the *chǒngsomyŏn*'s audience in 2000, it is both central and marginal to the spectacle.

Mass gymnastics were held in the Mansudae Stadium until the larger, 150,000-seat May Day (Rungrado) Stadium opened. Despite the attempts to distinguish gymnastics from other elements, over time they were integrated with acrobatics, singing, and dancing. So, like revolutionary operas, they became a comprehensive art form, as mass performance spectacles. Each spectacle has showcased the state, and "*Arirang*" was promoted to tourists who were prepared to pay high prices for tickets:

The spectacle delivers formative moral and political slogans to the domestic population and key diplomatic messages to the international community. In this sense, "*Arirang*" says what the North Korean state thinks about itself and its relationship to the outside world. (Kwon and Chung 2012, 46)

Notwithstanding my observation that the audience may be of marginal importance, Suk-Young Kim remarks that there has to be an audience to witness the display, although she finds "*Arirang*" fascinating precisely because there

are relatively few spectators who enjoy it (2010, 279–80). She cites reports in the journal *Chosŏn yesul* that talk up the foreign visitors, describing American, Canadian, Chinese, German, and Japanese tourists, but finds these exceptional rather than proving that the spectacle generated considerable attention from abroad. Still, some South Korean commentators, somewhat simplistically, ask whether “*Arirang*” was designed to earn foreign income. For example, Yi Kyehwan (2002) summarizes media discussions of costs and prices, noting that tickets were hugely expensive, while Chŏn Yŏngsun (2002) concludes that while revenue may have been one motive, the games had more to them. Indeed, after years of the “arduous march,” they were meant to reinforce the leadership cult and restore the notion of a utopia yet-to-come if the population remained loyal. This, in the 1970s, had been the function of revolutionary operas. The leaders might attend the games, and, indeed, Kim Jong Il attended twice in 2002. But at times the leaders nonchalantly chose to stay away, hence the teenage gymnasts in *A State of Mind* have to fall back, hiding their disappointment, on the assured belief that the Dear Leader must be too busy with state affairs to attend any of the 40 performances they give after their long, intensive, and exhausting training.

Mass performance spectacles tell stories. The 1988 event was given by 50,000 children in the arena, with many more providing the backdrops. It was divided into eight acts and a finale, giving the orthodox history and projecting forward to a utopian future, centered around the leaders: Korea in the past, the birth of Kim Il Sung and his early life, victory in the guerilla war, victory over American aggression, rebuilding the state, and the glorious future. Much the same story was told in the 1982 “Song of Glory,” as introduced in Chapter 5, except that an account of Korea before the birth of Kim Il Sung was added. “*Arirang*” was given by 100,000 participants. Cast in five acts and a finale, it began with the compressed history, then explored the people’s struggles and the emergence of the *sŏn’gun* military-first policy. It showcased examples of how dreams became reality—now because of both Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il’s guidance—appealed for the reunification of the two Korean states, and depicted the glorious future that would surely come (Frank 2013, 8–43). Essentially, then, mass performance spectacles retell the same “closed epic universe” that has remained unchanged since “Sea of Blood,” and that continues “to rely on the apocalypticism, ahistoricism, and epical dimensions of the nationalist allegory, which operates as a form of exhortatory propaganda that provokes the national populace to act; not to question, not to think” (David-West 2006, 80, 86). However, “*Arirang*” places

Kim Jong Il center stage: Figure 7.1 (and the cover to this book) depicts its celebration of his birth in (according to the official account) a Mount Paektu wooden hut in deep winter, in front of which massed dancers in white represent snowflakes and massed female guerrillas play a new instrument associated with him, the *õũngũm*.<sup>13</sup>

In mass spectacles, the theatrical state seen from outside begins to fade as the panorama transforms into a panopticon. Spectacles are about participation, and the watching domestic audience, whether attending a performance or viewing a recording, “should metaphorically recognize itself in the performing multitude” (Suk-Young Kim 2010, 280). The people *are* the spectacle. Theater can turn inward because spectacles are primarily for domestic consumption; tourist dollars are an add-on benefit. Participation becomes part of the totality of regimented life, expanding the culture of surveillance and indoctrination that characterize everyday life.

Spectacles, more so than revolutionary operas, become exceptional rituals (after Lankov, Kwak, and Cho 2012).<sup>14</sup> As Udo Merkel puts it:

Long hours and months of strict and exhausting training [are] meant to instill and consolidate an ideology that does not tolerate deviation: surrender of the individual to the group, promotion of a single, unified collective will and effort above any individual desires or self-interest. This may seem oppressive and inherently distasteful but, in fact, it is generally considered an honor to be part of the Arirang Festival and only the most gifted are selected to join. (2013, 1254)

Kim Jong Il’s statements illustrate this, extending the Germanic *Korpurkultur* idea to embrace domestic ideology. Hence, rather than show concern for health and physical well-being, he required mass performance spectacles to train children and all participants to be “fully developed communist people.” Through them, “party members and other working people are firmly equipped with our Party’s *juche* idea, and the validity and great vitality of our Party’s lines and policies” (1997 [1987], 1–2). For this reason, routines are made unnecessarily complex at the specialist end, designed so that a mistake by one participant means a whole team is likely to fail. There is no space for error, so a team with a single failing member will be, as is witnessed in the documentary *A State of Mind*, collectively and summarily sent home.<sup>15</sup> In Engelian terms, if a single tooth breaks the entire cog fails.



Figure 7.1 Celebrating the birth of Kim Jong Il in the “*Arirang*” mass spectacle, with female guerrilla fighters playing the new lute, *ŏūngŭm*, and dancers as snowflakes dressed in white. Photo by Werner Kranwetvogel, used with permission.

How, though, can the two sides of calisthenics and specialist gymnastics be prescribed on paper, for individual/local instructors and individual/local groups to work from? How do spectacles evolve over time, and how are they taught? To probe these questions, the next section moves to a consideration of notation. Given the significant place occupied by spectacles, the system that has been developed, *chamo p’yogiböp*, has, by necessity, broad utility, even though it is usually discussed in terms of its use for dance. By way of preamble, I first introduce the use of notation for dance beyond the borders of North Korea.

### Notating dances, prescribing spectacles

Dance has long been considered “an evanescent, illiterate art” (Johnson Jones 2009, 38), or as “the throwaway art” (Hutchinson Guest 1984, xi), because, although technological advances have made recording possible, much choreography was, until recently, lost after performances ended (Reason 2006, 8–29). Dance has commonly been taught through doing, but oral/aural transmission is both intensive and intimate; efficiency, and, for the discussion here, the scaling up of training to work for mass participation, is no simple matter. In Pyongyang, then, it was important to develop a notation system that would facilitate transmission to the masses. The attraction of creating a quasi-scientific understanding of movement made the appeal even greater.

Notwithstanding mnemonic aides, occasional uses of written notation for dance in Europe track back many centuries, at least to the fifteenth-century Burgundian manuscript and the Spanish *Cervera* system. Most notations, though, are more recent, and, to borrow Charles Seeger’s (1958) terms for musical notation, they are either prescriptive or descriptive—that is, either blueprints for what should be performed or reports of what was performed. Some are amalgams of the two. A prescriptive system is essentially a shorthand mnemonic built on previous knowledge that omits much of the knowledge gained from oral/aural training and expects users to recall and reinsert what is left out (as discussed, in respect to music notation, by Davies 1978, 188). It typically requires teachers with high levels of expertise. Teachers control access and maintain hierarchies of masters and disciples, experts, and novices. Descriptive systems are less common. They pack detail in a manner that limits their utility as a performance aid, since their complexity typically



means a performer will struggle to read the notation while reconstructing the music/dance in real time.

Notations, though, are cultural phenomena. They are the products of times and places, and they assemble sets of decipherable signs to represent elements of specific events. As a result, a system designed for training, say, ballet dancers or Western classical musicians will not necessarily work for the reconstruction of, say, sub-Saharan dance or drum-heavy traditions across Africa. Again, a system that measures physical effort will struggle to depict points and poses. Notation systems and training methods for music offer a useful parallel. They have been discussed extensively by ethnomusicologists (e.g., Hood 1971, 50–122; Ellingson 1992), but in my comments here, I also take inspiration from the structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss's (1955) discussion of the relationship between an orchestra and its notations. Notations bundle together structural codes in a two-dimensional way, the bundles (or *mythenes*, to Lévi-Strauss) being read both from left to right for each individual part (seen by individual instrumentalists, who add the omitted elements known from their training), and synchronically top to bottom as a single unit creating harmonic textures (the full score, seen only by the conductor).

In North Korea, the ideology of cultural production requires claims to modernity, science, and uniqueness, as Kim Jong Il duly provides in his treatise *Muyong yesullon* (Dance Theory, 1992). Ideology also insists that those who devise a notation should be cognizant of, but improve on, systems championed elsewhere in the world. It must be comprehensive and useable for any dance, yet *juche* ideology demands it be socialist in content and national in form, capturing Korean particularity—the *pat'ang*. Beyond this, Pyongyang needed a prescriptive notation system that would be sufficiently comprehensive to fit the state's use of dance and movement, both more broadly among the mass dancers I watched stretching to the edges of Kim Il Sung Square in April 2000 and more narrowly among the highly trained dancers and acrobats who performed in the central space at the same event. The two uses, however, required notation to accommodate different levels of complexity: the first simpler than the second, but the second anticipating a greater level of interaction with skilled teachers than the first.

Most preexisting systems that might have been adopted had been devised by and for specialist dancers, and as a result privileged postures and positions over movement (Hutchinson Guest 1984, xiii). In Pyongyang, though, the broad use for mass performance spectacles had to balance movement with

dancing. Further, where notation on paper is two-dimensional, the requirement was to represent three-dimensional movement in space. Existing systems commonly freeze positions or prescribe movement and effort, but the limitations of two-dimensional plotting make it challenging to manage both. Thus, to develop a new notation is a big ask, even though the not unexpected claim, made in a report by Yun Yong Ok and carried in the English-language journal *Korea Today* in July 1987, is that the North Korean system overcomes all obstacles. Yun reports that the new system prescribes “the positions of parts of the body according to the changing positions and directions in space.” It is, she writes, “free from the limitations of dance notations known so far,” because it is “based on the study of the specific features of the movements of the human body and makes it a principle to indicate the movements as the main elements of the dance notation and positions and directions as the spatial elements” (1987, 9–10). Still, the notation remains two-dimensional. Indeed, a typewriter was modified to produce it before a computer program, *Paekhak*, was developed at the end of the 1980s—and the latter continued to be celebrated as late as a May 12, 2013, article carried in the party newspaper, the *Rodong Shinmun* (*Workers’ Daily News*).

Those responsible for the notation are reported to have studied and learned from systems used abroad. Yun writes about a congress held in August 1984, which she claims attracted more than 250 dancers, notation experts, and others from 21 nations:

Who can forget the “Overview of Benesh, Eshkol-Wachman and Labanotation” during which there was frantic writing on the board, followed by increasing clamor and argument? When it was announced that the buses were waiting, someone yelled, “Let them wait!” (Yun 1987, 10)

A propaganda video produced for an international symposium on dance, hosted in Pyongyang in 1988, briefly shows charts of the three non-Korean systems Yun names, with the dates of their creation (1956, 1958, and 1927, respectively). The three are normally considered the major twentieth-century systems, but Yun states all three are imperfect and fail to “satisfy the public for want of scientific precision, utility value and popularity.” She offers no indication of what the new system took from them, even though some influences are apparent. For instance, the new system retains Benesh stage indications. The Benesh system, developed by dancer Joan Benesh and visual artist and musician Rudolf Benesh, was patented in 1955 and



began to be used in teaching at the Royal Ballet School in London the next year. It adopts a visual approach, on the basis that dance is observed “by the eyes” (Hutchinson Guest 1984, 98), but adds spatial plotting to position the movement of key body parts.<sup>16</sup> Detailing is provided in supplementary texts, using ballet vocabulary (ballet, though, has largely been abandoned in North Korea in a rejection of flunkeyism). The Benesh system has undergone considerable development and refinement since its introduction, but Pyongyang’s scholars appear to have had limited access to its later materials.

Again, the North Korean system uses numbers and alphabet symbols, as does the Eshkol-Wachman system, developed by dancer and choreographer Noa Eshkol and architect Abraham Wachman. That system moves away from the visual to focus on the biomechanics of movement, aiming to provide a “means of composing movement sequences in terms of degrees of movement . . . not only the description of destination” (Hutchinson Guest 1989, 118). It offers a precise gradation of symbols and, in particular, numbers, to denote anatomical movement, breaking the reliance on two-dimensional visual representations (the archetypes for which would be stick men, or pictograms of hand/arm or foot/leg positions to capture poses marking the start or end of movements). Such representations require the reader to imagine movement.

Movement begins in one place and ends in another. To notate this, symbols in Labanotation, the oldest of the three systems referenced by Yun, define parts of the body and their movements in terms of effort. Symbol sets combine to allow movement to be recorded. Situated toward the descriptive end of the scale, Labanotation is designed primarily for study and analysis, and it accepts that “movement itself is not a position or even a change of position” but is, rather, “a fluid, dynamic transiency of simultaneous change in spatial positioning, body activation and energy usage” (Moore and Yamamoto 1988, 184). It does not, despite Yun’s claim to the contrary, “lose valuable heritage” (1987, 10),<sup>17</sup> but, as a system to describe dance, it lacks utility and hence has no obvious applicability to North Korean practice. Labanotation can certainly capture local distinction, such as the sudden flick of the wrist so characteristic of traditional Korean dance, and which is retained in the dances of revolutionary operas. That the flick survived until revolutionary operas is, incidentally, clear from the plates to a 1988 score, *Hyŏngmyŏng kagŭk muyong chŏngbo* vol. 1 (Revolutionary opera dance score 1), which illustrates dances in Act 3, Act 5, and Act 7 of “Sea of Blood,” and in Act

5 of “The Flower Girl.” Again, Labanotation can capture the subtleties of the traditional but peculiarly Korean “motion in stillness” (*chǒngjungdong*) framing that, based on Taoist philosophy, positions each dance element as part of a continuous flow, avoiding the pointing of ballet, and utilizing cyclic movements—alternations of bending and extending to lower and lift the body, shoulder movements that rise with breath inhalations and a stretch of the back that releases as the shoulders and back relax, and arms that extend outward from the shoulders but gently curve with wrists turned so that the thumb surface of the hand is directed forward with the fingers curved down or up.

North Korean sources do not mention other notations that may have been explored. Vladimir Stepanov’s system, which was developed by a dancer with the Imperial Ballet in Saint Petersburg, first introduced through a text published in Paris in 1892, adopted by the Bolshoi Theater School in 1895, and then providing the foundation for Vaslav Nijinsky’s (1889–1950) choreographies for Sergei Diaghilev, may well have been known, not least because of its use of alphabet symbols. Also, by the 1980s, the decade when North Korea publicly introduced its new system, similar work was being done in China, documented in a number of publications, such as Wu Manying’s *Wudao dongzuo suhua fa* (Shorthand Sketch Method of Dance Movement), Long Zhengqiu’s *Xin wupu jifa* (New Dance Notation Method), and Wu Jimei and Gao Chunlin’s *Dingwei fa wupu* (Fixed Position Method of Dance Notation).<sup>18</sup>

The official timeline for the development of Pyongyang’s notation, recounted in Chapter 4 of Kim Jong Il’s treatise on dance, begins in the 1970s, when Kim is said to have responded to his father’s call for a notation system to be developed. At that time, the claim that revolutionary operas were an all-embracing art made a system for dance notation, as well as ways to codify stage and lighting directions, highly desirable: lyrics and music could readily be prescribed on a two-dimensional page, and so too should dance. The new system, *chamo p’yogibŏp* (or *chamoshik p’yogibŏp*, sometimes abbreviated as *chamobŏp*), “alphabet notation system,” was reputedly shown to Kim Jong Il on June 25, 1976. It featured scores, read left-to-right, and matching music staff notation. The score used three lines, much as the three central lines of Labanotation, but shifted to a horizontal plane from Laban’s vertical top-to-bottom script. Scores, briefly stated, used sets of symbols derived from other dance notations, from music staff notation, and from the Korean alphabet.

### *Chamo p'yogibŏp*

Despite the official timeline stretching back at least to 1976, I have found no publication that refers to or uses the new system prior to 1987, the year that a promotional English-language explanatory booklet was published in Pyongyang. The dances from two revolutionary operas, "Sea of Blood" and "The Flower Girl," appeared in 1988, as cited above, and a second volume in the same series, with dances from "A True Daughter," followed in 1989. The year 1988 also saw the publication of a notation for a national dance (*minjok muyong*) created in or before 1971 by the Mansudae Art Troupe, "Choguk ūi Chindallae/Azaleas of the Homeland," and a comprehensive score of "Song of Glory," which had first been performed in 1982. The latter contained a reduced piano score, multiple dance parts and acting directions, a score for lighting, and a separate series of stage instructions. A score for "P'yŏngyangsŏng saramdŭl/The People of Pyongyang Fortress" soon appeared, and a score of the 1988 revival of "Ch'unhyangjŏn" was published in 1991. The last of these has three components: a full music score (pages 10–496); a section illustrating costumes, props and stage sets (497–544); and a dance score (545–645). A supplement explains each system (646–55). There is, then, a considerable gap between when it is claimed the system was revealed to Kim Jong Il and publications featuring it. Tellingly, two volumes of dance notations by Pak Chongsŏng published in 1984 give elementary floor positions and directions but have no trace of the new notation system.

International interest in the notation system was stimulated by the 1987 English-language booklet, then by a symposium that opened in Pyongyang on April 8, 1988. As reported by the Korean Central News Agency, this attracted a delegate from UNESCO along with artists and dance specialists from Algeria, Bulgaria, China, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Mongolia, Poland, and the Soviet Union, as well as Koreans resident in Japan. Kim Ch'angguk, the vice minister of culture, gave an opening speech, reporting how, under "the wise guidance and care of dear Comrade Kim Jong Il," a study group had been working for many years "to develop dance on a more scientific basis." A further symposium, "Research and Work on Different Fields of Dance," was held in September 1992, inviting specialists from beyond the Communist and non-aligned world.

The years 1987 and 1988 saw the publication of a book detailing the system, in Korean and English respectively, by U Chang Sop [U Ch'angsŏp]. A photograph memorializing Kim Jong Il's 1976 inspection of the system

provides the English version's frontispiece, duly protected from dust by a sheet of tissue paper. U reiterates how Kim's involvement was central:

Although dance has a long history, no scientific and easy dance notation has ever been perfected. . . . The Dear Comrade Kim Jong Il, with a deep insight into this state of affairs . . . said: "We should produce a scientific and popular dance notation of a *juche* type consonant with the specific features and requirements of the art of dance." The Dear Leader . . . clarified various theoretical and practical problems arising in the creation, use and dissemination of the dance notation, including the basic orientation for notating dances in the manner of alphabetic combination, the principles of dance notation, and the question of simplifying the shapes and combinations of dance script. Subsequently, he provided further guidance . . . on many occasions. (U 1988, 1)

The echoes of Kim Il Sung's on-the-spot guidance are, surely, deliberate. The senior Kim's 1956 visit to the Kangsŏn steel mill remains central to his personality cult, and is celebrated in a 1974 dance work, "*Kangsŏn ŭi noŭll* / Labor of Kangsŏn."<sup>19</sup> Again, following the December 1959 Party Central Committee's plenary session, the 15 days Kim spent in February 1960 in the village of Chongsan defining an agricultural method is also memorialized,<sup>20</sup> as is the T'aean industrial work system, set out based on his guidance at the T'aean Electrical Machinery Factory in December 1960. At Chongsan and T'aean, party functionaries were made to work alongside factory and agricultural workers—again, the specialist and spectacular were rendered popular and everyday. On-the-spot guidance, considered more broadly and pushed back through the centuries, is little different from how East Asian history is peppered with the achievements of kings and emperors, with King Sejong (r. 1418–1450) particularly championed in Korea as the creator of the Korean alphabet and as the guiding hand behind inventions such as the rain gauge, sundial, water clock, and more.

In 1976, when Kim Jong Il supposedly inspected the new dance notation, he was actively developing his own personality cult. He had begun to polish it through his involvement with films and revolutionary operas, and dance offered a logical extension. Two years earlier, in 1974, newspapers and journals, including the official party organ, *Kullŏja*,<sup>21</sup> had begun to write about the "party center." Usually, Kim was not named, but reports quoted artists praising the party center, indicating the important place cultural

production had in establishing his cult. His birthday in 1976 marked a coming of age. Posters appeared in factories and mines calling for increases in production, and work assignments were announced that were to be completed by February 16. On that day, his birthday, 15,000 children and youth participated in a scaled-down mass performance spectacle, proclaiming loyalty to both Kim Il Sung and the party center (Buzo 1999, 105). It is, then, unsurprising that 1976 is reported to have been when he inspected the new dance notation. Of course, he would have to wait two more decades to come into his inheritance, and it was only in 1980, following his election at the Sixth Congress of the Korea Workers' Party, that he was announced as heir. As leader-in-waiting, it is often argued that his involvement in artistic production demonstrated loyalty to his father, but a more prosaic interpretation would be that it solved the age-old problem of East Asian dynasties: how to keep an heir-apparent occupied without them plotting to oust the current leader.

Developing a complex system to notate dance required extensive and varied expertise. Unless we accept at face value all claims made for Kim Jong Il,<sup>22</sup> we should be wary of the extent of his guidance, and, indeed, in accepting the claims made for it:

- It is based on "a scientific analysis of the anatomy and physiology of the human body, all attributes of its movement, specific features of dance actions and all representative elements of the art of dance."
- It is comprehensive, indicating actions, floor patterns, relationships between dancers, time, and so on.
- It uses symbols for shapes and gestures that parallel the function of vowels but "evoke the shapes and rhythmic images of parts of the body." It also uses symbols for positions and directions that parallel the function of consonants.<sup>23</sup> Taken in combination, these symbols "form dance words and dance sentences . . . according to definite laws."
- It is suitable not just for Korean dance "but also the national dances of all other countries, and calisthenics, mass games, and figure skating as well." (U 1988, 1–2)

In 2003 Ann Hutchinson Guest told me how, after inspecting the 1987 booklet, she had requested clarification from Pyongyang of symbols she felt required additional explanation. She never received a response. But she did attend the 1992 symposium. In a report on it (Hutchinson Guest 1993), she

notes how a practical demonstration in Pyongyang missed performance subtleties of movement from scores, how balletic sequences appeared simple to write and read back, but how African movements proved a particular challenge to capture. In a typed letter to me several years later, she continued,

The system clearly works at a general practical level. As a tool for elementary and advanced dance education it lacks a sound anatomical movement analysis and the existence of an "alphabet" in the sense of movement verbs, adverbs, nouns, etc., and symbols representing them which are flexible in use—features which in Labanotation have proved so valuable.<sup>24</sup> Much practical inventiveness has been applied in the development of the *chamo* system, for example, economy in the use of symbols, yet an important question is the range of movement and [the] dance experience of the designers of the system. . . . Although it serves the needs in the middle range of structured movement description, the freer, general usage needed in education as well as in much avant-garde choreography is clearly not taken care of, nor, it would appear, has it been applied to the very advanced level of subtle movement description.

In June 1992 I spent a day learning about the system from U and others at the Dance Notation Institute (Muyong p'yogi sent'ŏ) attached to the Pyongyang Music and Dance University. At one point, young teenagers were ushered into the room. "Let's create some notation," said my host, quickly typing a few lines using the computer program, *Paekhak*, and printing them out. He handed the sheet to the teenagers, and they danced the sequence. I was duly impressed, but I had little way to verify the spontaneity of what I was observing. However, dance notation, alongside music notation, had by then been made part of the middle and high school curriculum, using scorebooks of short dances (such as Ch'oe Munshin 1992). I was told how the full system could be learned in 120 hours, and that only half this time was needed to master notation for group dances and mass performance spectacles. In contrast, it may conceivably be possible to acquire a rough grasp of Labanotation in a short period, but competence takes many months or even years of study. If proficiency can be achieved in the short period claimed, then *chamo p'yogibŏp* would mark a significant breakthrough, but since it does not separate the two functions of mass performances and professional staged dances, concentrating on what Hutchinson Guest labels the "middle range" of movement, it has to rely on simplification and abbreviation. As already

noted, this works when readers (dancers) are familiar with the movement sequences to be replicated, since they are able to interpret the shorthand.

The notation works, then, for Korean dance, and for movements derived from what is familiar, such as Soviet dance or the dances of Soviet satellite states. Even though the 1988 video claims universality, and that the system can capture all dances, it samples only ballet, Korean, Russian, and Eastern European dances. Further, because the control filters of seed theory, collective creation, and strict censorship make free creation anathematic to practice, *chamo p'yogiböp* has no need to facilitate avant-garde techniques and movements yet to be invented. In sum, claims to universal applicability, to being scientific and comprehensive, can be made, but within North Korea they need never be tested. Of course, music staff notation is no different; it is Eurocentric and captures, in shorthand, the elements of Western art music considered important (melody and melodic progression, harmony, and metricity). Arguably, staff notation omits aspects that may be important to other musics (timbre, precise duration, resonance, and so on), although those who use it can add new symbols to serve specific needs. But staff notation is widely used to notate music across the world, just as it is the music notation used in Pyongyang.<sup>25</sup>

The mass dance I watched in April 2000 illustrated a prosaic use of notation. Choreography was never complex: forward-step-step-step, back-step-step-step, forward-step-step-step, spot-step-step-clap, sidestep-right-step-sidestep-half-turn, sidestep-left-step-half-turn-clap, and so on. The effect was achieved because of the relationship between center and periphery, and because of how distinct groups of dancers intersected. To prepare for such an event, notation is a small part of the task, in which artistic functionaries, practice space, and practice times are assigned to each factory or office work team, and to each college cohort, well in advance. Practice sessions are scheduled for before or after work, and on specific days. Participation is claimed to be voluntary, but peer pressure and the incessant surveillance culture discourages dissent. Functionaries work with a team on new dances, using notation sheets and bringing in specialists as needed. For the mass dance event, rehearsals had begun the previous autumn, though we can assume there had been some disruption during the harsh winter (when Pyongyang temperatures plummeted to -30°C, and when many workplaces and apartment blocks had, according to reports at the time, no heating). Also, the repertoire is not learned anew each year, but, rather, the mix of songs gradually evolves. By repeating the dance to some songs the next year,



what has to be prepared in any single year is reduced, simplifying the mechanics of preparing the spectacle while better accommodating people with widely varying abilities. Some songs danced to in 2000 had been recorded almost a decade before—“*Sahoe chuŭi uri kōya*/Socialism Is Ours,” for example, dated from 1992, from the time when the regime finally found a way to tell the people about the collapse of East Germany.<sup>26</sup> Songs popular in the early 1990s about, for example, bountiful harvests or increased industrial production, were unsurprisingly absent after years of rationing and famine in 2000; instead, the favored lyrics were about happy people, and about the party and its leaders.

The notation system defines, first, basic body shapes, gestures, and actions, then positions and directions. Simplification occurs when shapes are marked as level or angled at 45, 90, and 135 degrees, and when the six positions (front, back, left, right, top, bottom) are given only single (45 degree) intermediate points. Gestures are isolated (turning, winding, twisting, swinging, waving, and so on) but with no specification of variation or degree. Stage positions are marked in a grid, with a simplification of movement direction to 45-degree poles. Two sets of symbols define shapes and gestures, positions and directions (Figure 7.2). The first includes symbols based on vowels, and the second on consonants, hence the system’s name, *chamo* (alphabet). Graphic symbols are relied on, and some symbols are taken from the ornament symbols for Korean traditional music (curiously, much as ornaments have been codified in Seoul since 1945<sup>27</sup>). Three additional symbol sets prescribe character (flicking, pressing, dabbing, chopping), body parts (instep/hand, thumb/big toe, elbow/knee), and a collection of actions (join, parallel, alternate, double, follow, pulsate). Symbols are combined to prescribe carriage, gestures, and directions—the example in Figure 7.3 shows one carriage position with both arms extended outward. A three-line stave is used to divide the body spatially, with the head above the top line, shoulders on the top line, arms between middle and top, waist on the middle line, legs between middle and lower, and feet on or below the lower line. The dance stave matches the five lines of music staff notation to facilitate timing and rhythm, and is read horizontally, left to right across the page. Timing indications employ Western note values (crotchet/quarter note, quaver/eighth note, and so on). Where music notation is given, it is placed above the dance stave, and stage positions, floor patterns, and relationships between dancers in a group are stipulated below the dance stave.



Symbols for Shapes and Gestures (Vowels)				Symbols for Positions and Directions (Consonants)			
	No.	Symbol	Name		No.	Symbol	Name
Symbols for Shapes	1	┆	Extended	Symbols for Positions	1	0	Front
	2	┆	Slightly bent		2	0	Back
	3	┆	Bent		3	0	Side
	4	┆	Very bent		4	0	Up
Symbols for Gestures	5	e	Turning		5	0	Down
	6	3	Winding		6	0	Diagonal
	7	H	Twisting		7	0	Conversely diagonal
	8	Z	Swinging		8	□	Right
	9	~	Waving		9	□	Left
	10	L	Supporting on body parts		10	↓	Upward
	11	Q	Rotating		11	↓	Downward
	12	Λ	Jumping		12	+	Position on stage
	13	X	Crossing		13	)	Inward
	14	h	Passing over		14	(	Outward
	15	U	Lifting	Symbols for Directions	15	→	Latitudinal
					16	↑	Longitudinal
					17	←	Level
					18	↓	Direction on stage
					19	o	Axis

**Figure 7.2** *Chamo pyogiböp*: gestures, positions, directions.

Source: U Chang Sop 1988, 32.

The opening of Act 5 of “*Ch’unhyangjön*” illustrates the complex mix of notations that were available by the late 1980s (Notation 7.1). The act opens with a popular farming song, “*Nongbuga*/Farming Song,” which as a folk song remained well-known to audiences because of the many transcriptions made in the first volume of folk songs assembled as musicologists began the work of collecting, analyzing, and reforming them in the 1950s (see Chapter 1). In earlier *pansori* and *chànggŭk* versions, “*Nongbuga*” was sung as Ch’unhyang’s lover Mongnyong was depicted passing struggling farmers as he journeyed

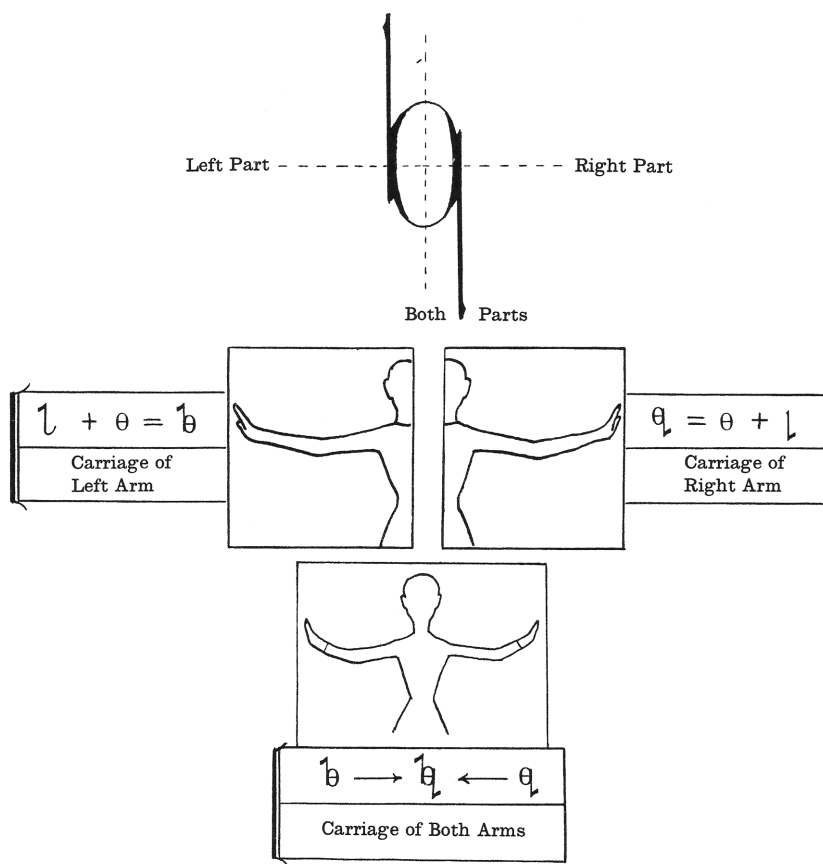


Figure 7.3 *Chamo p'yogiböpp*: composite notation giving carriage.

Source: U Chang Sop 1988, 37.

back to the city of Namwŏn, disguised as a beggar, but in reality a government inspector sent from the capital and charged with uncovering maladministration by the provincial magistrate. In the national opera, the story is reinterpreted as a farmer's festival. But, rather than workers toiling in the fields, a mask dance is shown that originated in Pongsan, a village near Pyongyang, even though the scene is still set on the outskirts of Namwŏn, the town where “*Ch'unhyangjŏn*” originated, some 250 kilometers further south. The Pongsan mask dance, *Pongsan t'al ch'um*, is one of the most celebrated on the peninsula, featuring in accounts and films of folk culture published in Pyongyang,<sup>28</sup> and in South Korea appointed as National Intangible Cultural

## 제 5 장 《농부가》중에서

출연인물표식

○ 탈을 쓴 무용가. 8명

소도구      탈      8개

△량반 1명

한삼 8조

무용 《탈춤》

△ 흥겨운 탈춤이 벌어진다.

[illegible]

**Notation 7.1** “*Nongbuga*/Farming Song,” Act 5, opening, in “*Ch’unhyangjŏn*/Story of ‘Spring Fragrance’” (1988). Excerpt from full score (1991, 593).

Property 17. The score uses four notation systems, with music at the top, reducing the full orchestra to a two-line piano score. Below this, a single line gives the floor patterns for dancers. This is the point at which eight pock-marked masked vagabonds run on stage, and above the line stage positions

are prescribed: come on stage and go to f2 (right back 2), move to the back [reverse] f8 (left back 8), then center left 7. Below the line the numbers of dancers, and particular dancers in the group, are given: eight come on stage, dancing together but entering individually in a single line. Below this is the dance notation, contained on three bracketed staves and first indicating latitudinal direction: all eight masked vagabonds face right, at a diagonal across the stage. The notation directs left arms to be bent back across faces and right arms to be extended forward, level. The head position is given above the top line, the hand position indicated with a “t” to signify that it is bent back at the wrist, and a diagonal pose is marked on the middle line. The leg movement is marked between second and third lines, a jump signified by the consonant “^” (s), followed by a symbol marking a step forward with the left foot. Symbols indicate that both arms and feet should shake. In summary, then, eight masked dancers, left arms bent back above the face so that wide sleeves partially cover faces and right arms held forward but with the hand bent back at the wrist, jump then race on from the left, moving in a single line to the right. They stop with arms and feet held in position, shaking. Finally, two bracketed lines below the dance notation give staging and lighting details.

### A pan-Korean notation?

*Chamo pyogibŏp* has occasionally been exported southward. Although a number of South Korean accounts of the system exist,<sup>29</sup> its most unexpected use in Seoul came when it appeared in volume 13 of the series *Kungjung muyong mubo* (Court Dance Notation Collection, 2009). This prestigious series is published by South Korea’s National Gugak Center (Kungnip kugagwŏn), the state institution charged with maintaining court and aristocratic music and dance traditions. Volume 13 notates the dance for state sacrificial rites, *ilmu* (lit. “line dance”), at the Royal Ancestral Shrine (Chongmyo, *Chongmyo cheryeak*) and at the Confucian Shrine (Munmyo, as part of the *Sŏkchŏn taeje* rite). These are the two most important extant rites in South Korea, the first protected since 1964 as National Important Intangible Cultural Property 1 and inscribed in 2001 on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and the second forming part of Property 85. The dance features in historical sources, including the 1493 treatise *Akhak kwebŏm*, allowing scholars to identify change over time, including changes made for a 1923 revival during the colonial period at the center’s predecessor, the Court Music Bureau (Aakpu, a.k.a. Yiwangjik Aakpu). The

*chamo p'yogiböp* score, written by the Chinese Korean Pak Yöngnam, an instructor at Yanbian Arts University in Jilin Province, China, is given synoptically alongside, first Labanotation (prepared by two Ohio State University PhD graduates, Yu Shihyön and Kim Kira), and second elemental stick figure and foot position notations. The latter had been routinely used in earlier volumes, starting in 1988 with volume 1, drawn by two senior musicians and dancers, Söng Kyöngnin (1911–2008) and Kim Chönhüng (1909–2007), both of whom had been training at the Court Music Bureau at the time of the 1923 revival. *Ilmu* was initially preserved in South Korea by those trained at the bureau, then by their students. But at the beginning of the new millennium, the dance as it was performed had been challenged as historically inauthentic. Critics argued that the 1923 revival, influenced by Japanese colonialists, “added and subtracted” postures in a way that “distorted the structure of the original” (Kim Yong 2006).<sup>30</sup> Söng’s disciple, Kim Yöngsuk, taught the students who danced *ilmu*. She was the wife of the center’s then director, Pak Ilhun. Confucian organizations wanted to reform the rites and replace the dancers. Hence, in preparing the volume, Kim Yöngsuk intended Labanotation to demonstrate a scientific, modern approach, and *chamo p'yogiböp* to establish her nationalist, pan-Korean identity. Still, the volume remains something of an anomaly. Pak resigned in 2011, ostensibly because of the disputed appointment process at the center for a new dancer. Remember, though, that while traditional music and dance in South Korea primarily centers around court and literati genres, such genres and rites have no place in North Korea, where they are considered feudalistic and elitist (as well as, in the case of rites, derivative of Chinese forms). In 1968 Kim Jong Il warned artists they “should guard against both the manifestation of flunkeyism and tendencies towards restorationism.” Again, in 1970, he commented on this: “While opposing nihilism towards our national cultural heritage, we must also reject the kind of restorationist attitude that sees all the things of the past in a favorable light and revives them without discrimination.”<sup>31</sup> In any assessment, then, the use of *chamo p'yogiböp* for court ritual dance is incongruous.

### Ch'oe Sünghüi and the development of dance in North Korea

Kim Jong Il’s comments were not intended to reject all dances from the past. As with folk songs, dances of the people, particularly those originating

within the folk tradition, were to be championed. One key dancer and choreographer, Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi (1911–1969), who had been doing just this during the latter years of colonialism, was central to what North Korean dance became.<sup>32</sup> Her systematizing dance book, *Chosŏn minjok muyong kibon*, prescribes postures and movements for a series of dances that link to tradition, including the Pongsan mask dance (1991 [1958], 127–58) which, long after her death, featured in the 1988 revival of “*Ch'unhyangjŏn*.” In the early 1930s, in the midst of colonial rule, Ch'oe had danced this as the “vagabond dance” (more fully titled as “*Pangnangin ŭi sorŭm*/Sadness of the Vagabond”), developing it until, for a performance in Tokyo in 1936, she reverted to simply naming it the “*Pongsan t'al ch'um*/Pongsan Mask Dance.”<sup>33</sup> Her book also prescribes her fan dance, “*Puchae ch'um*” (1991, 105–25), which, after her death, was employed in different versions in two revolutionary operas, “The Flower Girl” and “A True Daughter of the Party.” It also includes her secular version of a dance derived from a shamanic exorcistic practice, “*Salp'uri*” (1991, 159–79). When she first danced this last work in Tokyo in 1936, she titled it “*Munyo ch'um*/Dance of the Female Shaman,” but in North Korea it was fused with another dance taken from Buddhist practice, “*Sŭngmu*/Monk's Dance” to become “*Sugŏn ch'um*/Sleeve Dance”—a useful synonym substituting an aspect of costume (*sugŏn* suggests a scarf or towel as much as a sleeve) for references to religion and superstition. She used this same title to refer to a dance formerly associated with courtesans (J. *geisha*, K. *kisaeng*). These dances, collectively, are often considered by South Korean scholars to derive partially from another dancer's choreography, that of Han Sŏngjun (1874–1942), and both her fan dance and sleeve dance became models for North Korea's “Azaleas of the Homeland.”

Ch'oe's book analyzes body shapes, gestures, and actions, detailing foot and hand positions in an almost identical way to texts published in Pyongyang subsequent to her death, such as a dance theory text by Ri Mansun and Ri Sangnin (1982) and the 1987 and 1988 *chamo pyogibŏp* workbooks by U Chang Sop. She uses some of the simplifications that remained embedded in the new notation; for directions, for example, allowing only 45-degree divisions, and restricting hand/arm holds to 45-, 90-, and 135-degree elevations. She also details the more intimate movements involved in the “motion in stillness” complex, including the smallest up and down shoulder movements, the slightest rotations of the head, and delicate inward hand/finger rotations (1991, 10–66; see, particularly, 33–36).

In the same way that popular folk songs associated with the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries replaced local folk songs, North Korea's "folk dances" (*minsok ch'um* or *minsok muyong*) remain, essentially, Ch'oe's takes on traditional dances designed for stage use.<sup>34</sup> During the colonial period, she was central to developing these dances. She had great success, to the extent that she published an autobiography in 1937, when she was just 26 years old. Her work has long been widely studied in Japan, among Chinese Koreans (see, e.g., Ri Kŭmsun 2004), and, from the late 1980s onward, as democratization removed bans on discussing artists who had settled in the North, in South Korea.<sup>35</sup> Although she was not mentioned in South Korean accounts for four decades, dancers knew that they had inherited much from her. In North Korea, though, her name dropped from commentaries and reports in the mid-1960s and only reappeared in the new millennium; a May 2005 newspaper report announced that 40 of her dances had recently been revived (cited in Han Kyŏngja 2008, 251). The "folk dances" in Ch'oe's book represent only part of her oeuvre, though, and once she had settled in Pyongyang she immersed herself in determining what socialist art should be, moving from choreographing the 1948 staging of "*Ch'unhyangjŏn*," through large-scale works such as the historical "*Sadosŏng ŭi iyagi*"/The Story of Sado Castle" (1954; with music by Kim Ch'ŏewŏn, 1928–1997), tales of Pyongyang in "*Taedonggang ŭi kangbyŏnesŏ*"/Taedong Riverside," and the folk-song-inspired "*Nodŭl kangbyŏnesŏ*"/Nodŭl Riverside," to the revolutionary opera precursor "The Flower of Ch'ŏnsan Village."<sup>36</sup> She also created theater and children's dances, which she collected and published in two volumes (Ch'oe 1958, 1963).

Born on November 24, 1911, into an aristocratic family reduced to penury by her father's alcoholism and misfortune, Ch'oe graduated from Sukmyung Girls' School in Seoul in 1922. She initially made something of a mark as a singer before, in early 1926, she encountered the Japanese modern dancer Ishii Baku (1886–1962) and followed him back to Japan. She studied and performed with him, on and off, for eight years. Ishii had first studied ballet at the Imperial Theater (Teikoku Gekijō) in Tokyo, but came to doubt the value of ballet as art (Van Zile 2001, 186–88; Yoshida 2011, 56–57). He discovered he had greater affinity with the modernity of the American dancer Isadora Duncan and the Swiss-originating *eurythmie* of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze. In 1920s Europe, he was impressed by the expressionist works of Mary Wigman, who, in turn, worked with Rudolf Laban. Van Zile cites Hirabayashi, who writes that Ishii declared it necessary to "reconstruct



one's own ethnic spirit using an international or universal technique," and Wakamatsu, who characterizes Ishii's dance as being "his own style, neither German nor American" and a form of Japanese narrative dance (2001, 188, citing Hirabayashi 1977, 193 and Wakamatsu 1995, 210). Many of the elements that would later come to mark North Korean dance are here: storytelling, nationalism, reflections on internationalism, and celebrations of the body's movement/effort potential. It is certainly feasible, even if not a historical reality, to read connections between Wigman in Germany and dance in Pyongyang. For the National Socialists, Wigman had consolidated a group choreography based on the *Volk* (people), resolving problems associated with moving from individual (solo) to social (group) dances; she had developed *Tanz-Gymnastik*, a method oriented to amateurs, differentiating dance as art from calisthenics as exercise (Manning 1993, 2, 8, 85). Drawing a line to Pyongyang's spectacles from the opening of the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games that Wigman choreographed, "*Olympische Jugend/Olympic Youth*," is tempting, not least since "Olympic Youth" was on a grand scale, featuring 10,000 dancers, celebrating the Führer as paramount leader, and showcasing the myths of a rejuvenating Germany.

In the early 1930s, Ch'oe began to fuse Korean aesthetics to Ishii's dance grammar. This, in a nutshell, became what South Koreans refer to as "modern dance" (*shin muyong*). Her autobiography states that she never learned Korean dance from any single person, but she began to add demonstrably Korean elements after encountering Han Söngjun. She most likely worked with him for several short periods of less than a month each (Han Kyöngja 2008, 247). This, though, has been disputed by Ch'oe's student Kim Paekpong (b.1927), who argued that she was never taught by Han. However, Han was in Japan during the period when Ch'oe was there working with Ishii. It was Han who was credited with developing staged versions of traditional Korean dances for the first time, but he often did so by juxtaposing elements from different dances in a single work. So, for example, his "*T'aepyöngmu/Dance for Serenity*" incorporated foot movements from shaman rites but costumes and motifs from court dances, while his version of the shamanistic exorcistic dance "*Salp'uri*" (which became Ch'oe's "*Munyo ch'um*" and was then developed in North Korea as "*Sugön ch'um*"), was distant from what local shamans knew.

New dances were needed as theaters opened, and staged performances introduced a codification that generated distinct court and folk flavors.<sup>37</sup> At the court, dance had declined during the late nineteenth century. The



important court mask dance “*Chöyongmu*,” which became Chöe’s “*Kamyön üi ch’um*/Mask Dance,” is not mentioned in any documents from 1868 onward, and its official performances are assumed to have ceased (Park Jeong-hye 1997, 142).<sup>38</sup> Also, the number of performers employed at court declined rapidly, from 772, including dancers, at the start of 1895 to just 40, with no dancers, by 1922. Court dance has no place in Pyongyang, but staged folk dance does. The latter, in a nutshell, has two basic roots, one developed by Han and then Chöe and embracing regional performance and ritual traditions, and the other bridging courtesans formerly at the court with courtesans who practiced outside it. As noted in Chapter 4, courtesans were divided into three classes by the end of the nineteenth century, and those formerly attached to the court are known to have performed court dances at Seoul’s first theater, the Hyömnnyulsa,<sup>39</sup> in 1903, to celebrate the fortieth year of King Kojong’s reign, while those in the lower classes unofficially practiced prostitution. Their legacy was that women who danced in public fell short of Confucian morality, and it is not surprising that Chöe often found herself attacked for behavior considered lascivious.

Traces of more of Chöe’s folk-based dances survive in Pyongyang. One is a drum dance, “*Changgo ch’um*,” the third of her dances to be used in “Azaleas in the Homeland.” The origin for this was a solo or small group episode played by brawny male farmers in local percussion band performances.<sup>40</sup> Chöe created a more delicate aesthetic suitable for female dancers, using a single stick (the thin, whip-like *yöl ch’ae*) on a smaller drum and concentrating on movement. Presentations in North Korea today typically add a second stick, the mallet-shaped *kunggul ch’ae*, which allows more complex drumming patterns to be featured, and which maps on to mid-twentieth-century local band developments.<sup>41</sup> Another of Chöe’s dances also descends from percussion bands and uses the small *sogo* hand-held drum: “*Sogo ch’um*,” or, with streamers attached to hats, “*Sangmo ch’um*.” Chöe details a first version of this in her book (1991, 181–206), but for performances in Moscow in 1950 and, together with her “*Puch’ae ch’um*” fan dance at the Bolshoi Theater in 1957 for the Sixth World Festival of Youth and Students, she had already upsized this as “*Puk ch’um*,” replacing the small *sogo* with the much larger *puk* barrel drum. Local percussion bands use the *sogo* largely as an excuse for acrobatics, not least since its size and construction limits its effectiveness as an instrument (in fact, some bands in the past used sieves in place of drums). Hence, “*Sangmo ch’um*” is how Chöe’s dance usually is encountered in Pyongyang, at times incorporating long “12-arm length” (*yöltubal*) streamers attached to a skull cap worn on a dancer’s head.

The legacy of the dance that Ch'oe presented in Tokyo in 1934, “*Sŭngmu*/Monk’s Dance,” is also evident. This introduced the long sleeves that remain key to “*Sugŏn ch’um*” in the second movement of “Azaleas.” In Ch'oe’s early versions, the sleeves concealed drumsticks, and the explosive finale featured a drum mounted in a frame, like those found in Buddhist temples. In North Korea, the drum has gone and the sleeves have become arm extensions, projecting outward and upward into the sky, but the drum remains in South Korea, where “*Sŭngmu*” is protected as National Intangible Cultural Property 27. Many of Ch'oe’s dances are showcased in a video issued in Pyongyang by the Mokran company (ka-088677) featuring performances at the 2010 Spring Arts Festival.

One more of Ch'oe’s dances retains considerable significance: “*Kkal ch’um*/Knife Dance.” This is commonly known as “*Kŏmmu*/Sword Dance” in South Korea, where one version is preserved as Property 12. “*Kkal ch’um*” featured in the “*Arirang*” festival, but before then, in 1985, when North Korean dancers performed it as part of a rare artistic exchange with the South, it was this dance that alerted South Korean scholars to the continuing influence of Ch'oe in Pyongyang, kick-starting renewed interest in her legacy. “*Kkal ch’um*” is thought to date from the Three Kingdoms period some 1500 years ago. Articles in the journal *Chosŏn yesul* (1985/11, 2003/6) identify murals in the third Anak tomb, a fifth-century tomb to the west of Pyongyang, that are considered to depict a similar dance. Southern scholars have analyzed today’s northern and southern versions, finding similar structures, gestures, and expressions, but also differences: the southern dance concentrates on non-programmatic aestheticism, including elements of the inward-facing motion in stillness complex, while the northern version, on the basis of a socialist realist interpretation, uses rapid, sharp, attacking movements and rigid, upright postures (An, Min, and Pae 2002; Han Kyŏngja 2007).

During the 1930s, and known under the Japanese pronunciation of her name, Sai Shōki, Ch'oe’s fame spread beyond Korea. Toward the end of the decade, she embarked on a two-year tour of Europe and America. She was richly rewarded for a five-month performance contract with the Russian-born American impresario Sol Hurok (1888–1974), and when dance engagements dried up she worked as a model and, famously, as a muse for Picasso. She returned to Japan in 1940, and until Korea’s liberation in 1945 she traveled between Japan, Korea, and China. A 2008 South Korean commission ruled that Ch'oe should be listed (and remembered) as a collaborator with the Japanese colonial authorities, but, as I intimated in Chapter 5

in respect to writers, she had few alternatives to accommodation if she was to sustain an artistic career through the dark, final years of colonial rule. Escaping her association with Japan has been cited as one reason she settled in North Korea in 1946,<sup>42</sup> but this seems too simple. A more relevant reason is because in 1931 she married the Tokyo-trained, Russian literature scholar and political activist An Mak. He crossed to the northern zone before she did, and O Sajun (2015) argues, on the basis of comparing Ch'oe's statements in a 1946 article published in the *Minju ilbo* (*Popular Daily*) newspaper with An Mak's political tracts, she followed him because she shared his left-wing views. Charles Armstrong suggests a June 17, 1946, report by the American officer Ely Haimowitz may indicate a further reason. This report relates how Ch'oe returned to Seoul from Shanghai in spring 1946 and approached the American military government's education department for help to set up a dance school. She received no response, so she went to Pyongyang, where the Soviets first sent her and her group to Moscow to perform, and then, on her return, helped her set up a school (Armstrong 2003a, 77; see also Han 1957). Her school operated until 1956, when it was merged with the Pyongyang Music College.

In 1951 Ch'oe's troupe won first prize at the East Berlin Youth Festival for her "*Chosŏn ŭi ōmōni*/Mother of Korea." A celebratory performance was planned on her return to Pyongyang. But, at that time, factionalism was rife, and Ch'oe was targeted as the Soviet faction moved against South Korean artists and writers. According to the former deputy minister of culture Ch'ŏng Ryul, attempts were made to cancel the celebration on the spurious grounds that the political content in Ch'oe's choreography was inadequate, and because she was promiscuous and therefore should not be held in high regard.<sup>43</sup> But she sought and received protection from Kim Il Sung (Yi Ch'ŏlju 1966, 34–38; see also Myers 1994, 80; Gabroussenko 2010, 146–48). In 1955 she was back in the ascendant, and was appointed a people's artist, but at the end of 1957, both she and An Mak were attacked as being bourgeois (Scalapino and Lee 1972, vol. 2, 884–85, 901; Myers 1994, 90–93; Szalontai 2005, 132). An had been critical of Pyongyang's isolationism, the result of what he regarded as a narrow interpretation of nationalism marking the beginnings of *juche*, and had sought ways to challenge it. Ch'oe, meanwhile, is thought to have criticized new dance works that involved mass performances, particularly "*Ch'ŏllima*/Flying Horse," on the grounds that they lacked an artistic aesthetic. But her work "*Pak Hyŏnch'ŏn*," based on a historical figure, was criticized for lacking revolutionary optimism, while "*Ch'ŏllima*" went ahead.

Ch'oe lost her seat on the Supreme People's Assembly, and An was removed both as deputy minister and as dean of the Pyongyang Music and Dance College.

Ch'oe was back in the spotlight by 1961. But she was attacked once more in March 1962 for immorality (Myers 1994, 143). This time there was to be no reprieve. By 1964 her name had vanished from dance commentaries and programs. In November 1967 the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper reported that An and Ch'oe had been rearrested (cited in Tai Kawabata 2000), and stories began to circulate that both had been executed (see, e.g., Takashima and Ch'ong 1994, 214; Hwang Kyöngsuk 1994, 119). However, a gravestone for Ch'oe exists in Pyongyang, and this, although it may be questioned as to whether it actually dates from the 1960s, records that she died of ill-health on August 8, 1969.

### North Korean dance: An overview

Dance had been institutionalized by the time Ch'oe died, but her influence remained. Training was within the Pyongyang Music and Dance College, and state companies with dance troupes included the National Theater, the Mansudae Art Troupe, and, from the 1970s, the Sea of Blood Company. To conclude Chapter 7, then, I briefly consider what dance has become.

In June 1992 the composer Kim Wöngyun described to me how dance functioned in revolutionary operas:

We use many different types of Korean dance in our operas. The important thing about dance is that it provides additional characterization; it reflects on what is in the minds of the characters. In “Sea of Blood,” a woman is the main character. She is sent to prison, where . . . she dreams, and in that [scene] we use dance. It is important that the dance expresses her psychological state.

This, however, is not what the “*Ch'unhyangjön*” scene excerpted in Notation 7.1 attempts. “Azaleas of the Homeland” also occupies different territory, even as it previews the perspectives of revolutionary operas and may have been in Kim's mind when he made the above comment. The first revolutionary opera, “Sea of Blood,” is echoed in its theme, since “Azaleas” is set during the colonial period and is about the women's volunteer force that Mother (and,

according to the official history, Kim Il Sung's mother, Kang Pansök) joined. The first scene of "Azaleas" includes a celebrated song from which the dance takes its title, composed by Chŏng Seryong (b. 1930) in 1968. This is reminiscent of "Song of Sea of Blood," which, as noted in Chapter 6, was itself developed from Sŏng Tongch'un's "I Keep My Red Spirit Single-Heartedly," written close to the same time. The scene depicts the lakeside, rising from the volcanic crater atop Mount Paektu, the shore covered by pink azaleas in full bloom, anticipating the field of flowers that would soon be used to open the third opera, "The Flower Girl." The volunteers "press their faces on the mother earth for joy and feel the warmth of the motherland to the marrow" (Yun 1987, 25). To North Korean audiences, this is a reminder that the guerrillas, led by Kim Il Sung, supposedly had their bases on Mount Paektu.

As the cult of Kim Jong Il became more entrenched, Kim Il Sung's wife and Kim Jong Il's mother, Kim Jong Suk, and her women's guerrilla group, needed to be championed. So, in the second scene, "*Nuni naerinda*/Snow Falls," female dancers become the guerrillas, descending from the mountain like angels, evoking the mythical Tan'gun, wearing white diaphanous costumes with long, floating sleeves. As the sleeves are thrown into the air, in a development of Chŏe's "*Sugŏn ch'um*," we return to a dance showcased in the second opera, "True Daughter," but the music is an arrangement of Ri Myŏnsang's eponymous 1965 song given in Notation 1.2. The backdrop at the scene's end is Pyongyang, as rebuilt by Kim Il Sung, foreshadowing the conclusion to "True Daughter," but replete with post-liberation monuments. The third scene, "*K'ich'um*/Dance of Winnowing," opens as a bright red sun rises, signifying Kim Il Sung as the sustainer of life. The final scene of "The Flower Girl" is based on a similar idea.

In "Azaleas," each dancer holds a winnowing fan, using it to update Chŏe's "*Puch'ae ch'um*" fan dance, which in turn will feature in two operas. The fourth and final scene, "*Sagwa p'unngnyŏn*/Bumper Harvest of Apples," invokes more memories, particularly of Chŏe's dance with the hourglass-shaped double-headed drum, "*Changgo ch'um*." The published score is prefaced with the obligatory quote from a leader, in which Kim Jong Il claims credit for inspiring its creation. He calls "Azaleas" revolutionary (*hyŏngmyŏng*), a development of national (*minjok*) dance, written in accordance with *juche* ideology. The same claims are made in an article by Chŏe Sŭnggŭn in the journal *Chosŏn yesul* (1972/2). But, as with several revolutionary operas, there is a hidden link to China, and to a model Cultural Revolution work, "Azalea Mountain," set at the same time and telling, similarly, of a peasant

self-defense force. In fact, a Korean-language version of this was prepared and performed in Yanji, in China’s Korean Autonomous Region, in 1974.<sup>44</sup>

The characteristics of settled North Korean dance, once *juche* ideology was in place, can be outlined by placing “Azaleas” next to revolutionary operas and other key dance works, such as 1964’s “*Konan ŭi haenggun*/ March of Trouble” (which again depicts guerrilla activity in the 1930s; see Kim Ch’aewŏn 2018, 72–74) and the 1974 “Labor of Kangsŏn,” which memorializes Kim Il Sung’s on-the-spot guidance. In dance, themes are rationed, and model dances are in place. Also, much as with songs, to be socialist as well as nationalist requires dance to be functional, embedding seeds within a clearly articulated story, and balancing characterization and action with movements that mix dances of other socialist states with postures—and aesthetic elements—from the Korean folk tradition, or, rather, their staged interpretations initiated by Chŏe Sŭnghŭi. The latter satisfies the *juche* demand for popular and populist creation, while functionality requires realism (the firing of rifles or the shoveling of coal, and strong movements framed through straight lines).

In contrast, artistry expects elegant movements, in which curved fingers and small foot shuffles subtly suggest characterization and action. These might normally be seen as contradictory, but revolutionary operas introduced the concept of “dance identity” (*ch’umsŏng*) in an attempt to square realism with artistry. And, as group dances replaced solo dances, much as ensembles and orchestras replaced solo instrumental performances, systematization, order, and consistency were required. Improvisation was removed and rhythmic foundations (*changdan*, the rhythmic codes that underpin traditional Korean music, or regular Western meters) strengthened, while dance notation using the *chamo p’yogibŏp* system ensured consistency—though, seemingly, the notation system was used only from 1987 onward (after Hwang Kyŏngsuk 1994, 2004; Yi Pyŏngok 2002). The resulting culture of dance stands at some distance from dance in South Korea, about which the northern perspective is not positive. Indeed, an article in the journal *Chosŏn yesul* in December 1985, argued that today’s South Korean dance profanes the nation, absorbs corrupt practices from America, and remains feudalistic, caught in a time warp that has no place in the modern world. That is, the modern world as interpreted within the isolationist ideology of *juche*.

## Composing the Nation

Our understandings of “composer” and “composition” reflect European Enlightenment celebrations of individual creativity. In old Korea, a piece of music was transmitted, inherited, and developed over time, but it often had no named creator, except perhaps the king during whose reign it supposedly originated. Western art music arrived late, and Korean composers and musicians began to develop competence in it only at the turn of the twentieth century. Kim Inshik (1885–1963) is normally remembered as the first Korean composer. As a child, he took music lessons in Pyongyang from two Christian missionaries, and is credited with composing the first Korean song in a Western style, “Student’s Song,” a school song (*chàngga*) written in 1903 (see Chapter 1). He moved to Seoul, where he became a violinist and composer, taking part in concerts and teaching at a short-lived music institute that opened in 1909, the Choyang Club (Chosŏn kurakpu). Two additional composers, Chŏng Sain (1881–1958) and Paek Uyong (1880–1930<sup>1</sup>), emerged out of a Western-style military band established in Seoul in 1901, trained by the German Franz Eckert. Chŏng remained close to the band until it faltered when, as Japan tightened its grip on the Korean peninsula, the royal court struggled to pay for it. One sheet of notation for a piano piece by Paek is reproduced in a book by the South Korean musicologist Chang Sahun (1974, 208), and a brief article by Mun Hayŏn in the North Korean journal *Chosŏn ūmak* (1965/11–12, 32–33) confirms his socialist credentials, although it also names three works that indicate both a colonial accommodation and arrangements of older literati music.<sup>2</sup> During the period of Japanese control over Korea, many more composers emerged, embracing the work concept of Western art production. Mostly, they studied in Japan, where they were trained to create pastiches of Western art music, using a tonal and harmonic vocabulary that, from a European perspective, would be deemed stuck somewhere in the mid-nineteenth century. After liberation in 1945, the initial aim in Pyongyang was to continue along the same path, gradually building the competence of composers, although the conduit for knowledge,



training, and expertise shifted from Japan to the Soviet Union. This chapter explores how composition activities developed.

### Learning to compose

Within four years of liberation, by the end of 1949, Ri Hirim (1956) reports that works by Russian composers, including Ashrafi, Dargomizhsky, Glinka, Ivanov, Kabalevsky, Mussorgsky, Radishchev, Rimsky-Korsakov, Shostakovich, and Tchaikovsky, had already been performed in Pyongyang, alongside eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European repertoire by Mozart, Beethoven, Lyadov, and Liszt. Retrospectively, Rim Kwangho (2014, 138–44) asserts that by the 1960s the Central Symphony Orchestra (Chungang kyohyang aktan), known in more recent times as the National Philharmonic Orchestra (Kungnip kyohyang aktan), was sufficiently accomplished to perform complex works such as Beethoven’s Fifth and Ninth Symphonies, and Tchaikovsky’s Sixth. Composition activity rapidly developed. Shin Tosŏn’s (1924–1975) accomplished First Symphony, for example, was written in 1955 and published and first performed in Pyongyang in 1958 (with a front page giving both the title and author in Korean, Russian, Chinese, and English).<sup>3</sup> The first performance was poor, according to Chŏe Ryongnin in *Chosŏn ūmak* (1959/4, 38–40), but April 1959 brought a much more accomplished reading.

Born in Hamgyŏng Province, Shin had joined the Korean People’s Army Ensemble (Chosŏn inmingun hyŏpchudan) in 1947, and two years later he was one of the first to be sent to Moscow for training under the new cultural exchange program signed by Pyongyang. On his return to North Korea, he worked at the National Arts Theater and at the state broadcaster, and was soon central within the Korean Composers’ Union, where his works were cited and his articles frequently published within its journal, *Chosŏn ūmak*. He cowrote, with the song composer Ri Myŏnsang, the 1958 version of the opera “*Millima iyagi hara*/Oh! Tell the Forest,” some 14 years before the revolutionary opera of the same name. He was appointed a merit artist in 1961. His symphony is a conventional, four-movement work. The first movement is in a textbook sonata form: a short introduction precedes a 4/4 *allegro* exposition that switches between G major and G minor in its two melodic subjects, then there is a 3/4 development section followed by a standard recapitulation. The second movement is a scherzo and trio, while the slow third movement



is in 6/8 but develops material taken from the first movement's first subject. Ideas from the first movement also return in the finale. The movements are not programmatic, and the harmonic language matches the standard text for budding composers first published by the so-called "Brigade of the historical-theoretical cathedral of the Moscow Conservatoire" in 1939. Much the same applies to a second work cited on his merit artist plaque, a violin sonata.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, two of the three string chamber works published in a 1959 collection<sup>5</sup>—Cho Kilsök's first string quartet, and Hong Sup'yo's (1926–1976) two-movement "sketch" (*sop'um*), both written in 1956—adopt the same musical language. Cho, whose 1958 song cowritten with Kim Wŏngyun was mentioned in Chapter 1, had been born in Wŏnsan, Kangwŏn Province. He first studied composition at what was then the Pyongyang Music School, and was sent to the Soviet Union in 1948 (to Leningrad rather than Moscow), where his graduation piece six years later was the symphonic poem "*Chogugŭl wihayo*/To the Motherland" (1954). He returned to a teaching position at his alma mater. Along with instrumental compositions such as the quartet, his output includes some 40 songs, folk song arrangements for piano, and a string orchestra folk song medley (1954). The medley became a model for other composers. The quartet follows a conventional three-movement form. The first movement is a straight sonata. The exposition opens with a pastoral *allegro* melody carried by the first violin, while the second violin and viola provide supporting fills built from quaver/eighth notes. There is a hint of folk song in the accompaniment. Shifting from the opening G major, the second subject starts in B minor (bar 33), with the viola providing a foundation beneath a canon between first and second violins. The development section begins in C major (bar 58) but moves through F, D $\flat$ , E, A, C $\sharp$  and D before returning to G at the start of a false recapitulation (bar 97); the proper recapitulation arrives at bar 110. The most interesting aspect of the movement is its shifting tonality, restlessly exploring distant keys in a manner far beyond what was normal among his compatriots.

Cho's second movement, labeled as a recitative and lullaby, bears a striking resemblance to Shostakovich's Second String Quartet (opus 68, composed in 1944). Cho's movement opens *andante* in a minor tonality, presenting plenty of first violin virtuosity as well as contrasting *rubato* passages above languid but unadorned supporting chords from the trio. A central lullaby is cast in 5/4, unusual in Korea when duple and triple meters remained normal, but managing to keep a well-known melody. So far, then, Cho has revealed a confident and creative mind. The finale opens with an echo of a traditional rhythmic cycle, *tongsalp'uri* (often referred to by northern musicologists as *salp'uri*), with

hemiola cutting across the 12/8 meter. Most of the movement is fugal: beginning in bar 5, the second violin gives the first statement of the subject, followed, four bars later, by the viola, then, after a brief augmentation, by first violin and finally cello; an episode brings the fugue back *stretto* (bar 31), then the full subject is restated on all four instruments in turn (bar 41 onward). The fugal subject, however, is more melodic than, say, that of a Baroque composer, and sticks within straightforward tonality. The reason is revealed when the mood changes and the quartet launches into an unadorned folk song, “*Toraji/Bellflower*” (bar 61). This popular folk song was growing in importance in North Korea, and over the next decades it would be a favorite in arrangements for reformed national instruments (such as the *ongnyugŭm* harp-zither arrangement excerpted in Notation 3.2). “Bellflower” eventually subsides through contrapuntal exchanges to a restatement of the fugue (bar 97). At bar 121 the two come together, demonstrating that the fugal subject is in reality merely a variation on “Bellflower” as the cello plays the folk song below the first violin’s fugue (Notation 8.1). The whole of the finale is pentatonic, abandoning the modulations and chromaticism of the first two movements, and this, together with viola rhythmic punctuations, reflects how Soviet composers had long discovered that the requirement for “realism” within socialist realism could be satisfied by including folk song melodies. In respect to the Soviet Union, Frolova-Walker cites the following, from a 1944 article by the musicologist Boris Asafyev (1884–1949):

How can we explain that constant, profound attraction to *pesennost’* [songfulness] which is always felt by every Russian musician? . . . The deeper and the more rooted the song melodies of the people are, and the purer they are in the sense of the authenticity of their [essential] intonation . . . the stronger the attraction. (Frolova-Walker 2007, 263, citing Asafyev, “O russkoy presennosti”)

Rim (2014, 93–137) argues retrospectively that, during the colonial period, music for national (Korean) instruments, *minjok kiak*, had been largely ignored by composers as they attempted to master Romantic pastiche, imagining themselves wearing the wigs of Mozart or Beethoven, writing for foreign (Western) instruments. He echoes Kim Il Sung’s warnings against resurrectionism and revivalism, however, which signaled potential dangers for those who chose to adapt local melodies. An alternative approach, then, was to be more progressive, and this is exactly what Hong Sup’yo attempts in his “sketch.” Expressionist and through-composed, it keeps no single song-like melody for any extended period. The brief folk-song-like cello opening

Allegro

violin I *mp* *pizz.*

violin II *arco* *mp*

viola *mp* *arco*

'cello *mf* *espressivo*

2 2

2 2 2 2 2

(...etc)

*f* 2 2 (...etc)

Notation 8.1 Cho Kilsók's (1926–1996) First String Quartet (1956), extract from third movement.

moves between minor and major, and soon descends to shifting chromaticism (in, for example, bar 41); the fifth bar becomes the basis for a new motif at bar 49, and this returns in bar 75 before the coda explores implications of some of its components (bar 83). The second movement, although primarily a fugal extemporization punctuated by descending bass lines that make use of Pythagorean circles of fifths, offers an introduction marked by considerable, almost Tristan-esque chromaticism: an opening Bm<sup>7</sup> chord sounded across the quartet resolves to a dissonant b-f-a<sup>b</sup>-e<sup>b</sup> cluster, then moves to an A<sup>7</sup> in which the bass starts by playing the major third (c<sup>#</sup>), briefly slips to the minor third (c<sup>♮</sup>), returns, then jumps up a tritone (to g) before resolving onto a diminished chord across all four instruments (Notation 8.2). Hong,

Andante

violin I

violin II

viola

'cello

Notation 8.2 Hong Sup'yo's (1926–1976) “sketch” (*sop'um*; 1956), introduction to second movement.

like Cho, had begun his training at the Pyongyang Music School. Born in Hamgyŏng Province, he was sent to Moscow in 1952. He was teaching violin back in Pyongyang by 1958, but was soon sent to the countryside, where he served as chair of the Musicians' Union in Ryanggang Province—the sparsely populated mountainous region bordering China that includes North Korea's portion of Mount Paektu. In contrast to Cho, then, and although his output does include songs, works for strings, and a few film scores, he lived out his life in semi-exile away from the center. One reason was that, like Ri Kōnu, his composition style clashed with the blend of pastiche and functional harmony that North Korea came to require as the local take on socialist realism evolved.

There was, though, an alternative approach for composers; namely, to adopt a more literal interpretation of socialist realism. This is what the third piece in the 1959 collection, with its programmatic title, “*P'yŏnji padŭn chŏnsal*/Letter-Receiving Soldier,” does. It is a short quintet, adding a double bass to the standard quartet, written in 1955 by Chŏe Sudong. Chŏe served in the Korean People's Army, and continued to write programmatic music through the 1950s, with his most striking work being a symphony that premiered in 1958, which, in a subtitle, commemorates a Korean War battle he took part in, “1211 Koji/Hill 1211.”<sup>6</sup> “Letter-Receiving Soldier” starts *allegretto*, with urgency and shock coming in semiquaver/sixteenth-note passages that rise chromatically to a sudden *adagio* played *fortissimo* as the letter of the title is received. Calm comes with a slow 6/8 folk-song-like *barcarolle* reminiscent of West Coast fishing songs. This is given a second time (beginning in bar 29) as the letter is re-read, then succumbs to a march (bar 45) as the soldier returns to his military life. A short recapitulation of thematic elements ends in a victorious cadence, *fortissimo*, in which rising flurries of semiquaver/sixteenth-notes resolve, abruptly, onto a repeated tonic chord played across all five instruments.

All four composers mentioned so far remained central to composition activity until the mid-1960s; a list of important works composed from the end of the Korean War, including works by all four, is given in *Chosŏn ūmak* in October 1965 (1965/10, 30–31). But from then onward, discussions of their works, and public concerts, were rare, until the 1980s, after the Isang Yun Music Research Institute (Yun Isang ūmak yŏn'guso) had been established under the Ministry of Culture. In fact, from 1959 onward, once Kim Wŏn'gyun returned to writing songs, and as Ri Myŏnsang's star shone ever brighter, the pages of *Chosŏn ūmak* reveal ongoing arguments. Chŏe's “Letter

Receiving Soldier” tells a story that is easy to follow, but the legacy of Lenin’s criticism of vagueness in artistic works, filtered through Zhdanov and Mao,<sup>7</sup> meant that North Korea’s ideologues campaigned, supported by Kim and Ri, for compositions to communicate messages with absolute clarity. To do so, composers were required to embrace the Korean *pat’ang*—the national character, disposition, and temperament. But by 1965 the notion of *pat’ang* had lost its association with discrete structural, formal, and tonal components—that is, the elements that could be learned in the Moscow Conservatoire and elsewhere, and elements that could be brought together in, say, a symphonic poem. Rather, within *juche*, *pat’ang* now reflected how well-known and how well-loved a piece of music was by the people and, also, how appropriate its subject was to North Korea’s revolutionary spirit (Rim 2014, 138–43).

### Songs as foundations

Distilled down, the *juche pat’ang* requirement made songs the foundations of every instrumental and orchestral work. Composers found themselves redefining composition (*kusŏng*), less as creation (*ch’angjak*) and more as organization, construction, or knitting together. This can be argued as being a return to the age-old tradition, re-establishing the dependency between inheritance and innovation (in fine art, the Korean terms are *kyesŭngsŏng* and *hyŏkshinsŏng*; Ri and Cho 2002, 166–67).<sup>8</sup> Songs, then, became the inspiration for composers.<sup>9</sup> Composition would henceforth prioritize arrangements (*p’yŏngok*), not just to retain the seeds of songs, but also to enhance them by interpreting and illustrating them through the judicious choice of instrumental settings and textures (Yi and Sŏ 2013, 84–97).

Bonnie Wade, in discussing the works of Japanese composers, describes school songs (J. *shōka*, K. *ch’angga*) within music education as the “primary connection” (2014, 17–32; see, particularly, 19–20). This is arguably the case for North Korean composers, but *juche* made additional demands. First, a song melody must never be disguised, since to do so risked losing communion with the seeds contained in its lyrics. Second, instrumental and orchestral music must be popular, coming from and being presented to workers, and linking to the party and leadership. Third, by the end of the 1960s, typical melodic forms, rhythmic cycles, instrumental lines, and accompaniment patterns were prescribed and schematized on the basis of a sense of locality measured in songs (Rim 2014, 269–340). Limits were placed on modulation

and chromaticism, and triadic harmony was demanded to underpin melodies. Nothing must detract from the song melody, so contrapuntal lines were only permissible if these responded to, but did not overpower, the melody. However, to attest to the ever-increasing skills of instrumental musicians, a soloist was expected to showcase virtuosity, so instrumental works came to include one or more cadenzas. Composers still studied European art music, but they were required to confine their attention to “sincere and genuine” music. This could be defined in reference to a time period, because elitist music associated with eighteenth-century courts and twentieth-century avant-garde music that had never been popular with the masses was undesirable (Yi and Sö 2013, 68–70). Still, the approved musical language, much as with Debray’s characterization of Soviet compositions (2007, 12) as well as with Japanese and Korean composers during colonial times, continued to hijack the Enlightenment.

Models were to be used. These, *inter alia*, were songs by celebrated composers such as Kim Wŏngyun, Kim Oksŏng, and Ri Myönsang. The structures of orchestral and instrumental music therefore abandoned Western sonata and rondo forms as they upscaled song structures, taking as their starting point the colonial-originating *yesul kayo* and *taejung kayo*. Typically, as shown in Table 8.1, a colonial-era song begins with an instrumental introduction based on elements of the melody, then the vocalist enters with a first verse and proceeds through a second and perhaps a third verse. An instrumental interlude might be offered before the final verse. This

**Table 8.1** Colonial-era song structures and North Korean instrumental/orchestral compositions

Colonial-Era Taejung kayo/Yuhaengga:

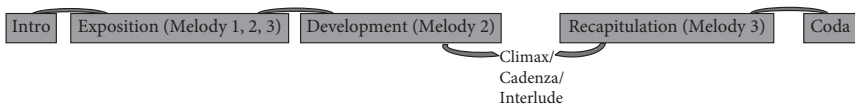


In North Korean instrumental/orchestral compositions, two possibilities are:

*Simple*



*Extended*



structure persists in today’s East Asian pop ballads, where the opening introduction and central interlude facilitate voiceovers by radio DJs or television VJs. Rim Kwangho uses this same *yesul kayo* and *taejung kayo* outline to set out acceptable structures for instrumental and orchestral works (2014, 197, 229). A simple structure will cycle around repeated statements of the song melody: introduction, cadence, melody (first statement), cadence, melody (second statement), cadence, melody (third statement), coda. A more complex form will have an introduction and coda but also a ternary core with exposition (melody statements 1, 2, and perhaps 3), middle section (development, normally taken from melody statement 2 but occasionally with new material, building to a climax), and recapitulation (typically taken from melody statement 2 or 3). Cadenzas come either before the first melody statement or before the final statement (or both).

The use of songs as foundations is evident in four instrumental pieces published in 1985: Pak Minhyök’s (1922–1988) “*Sahyangga*/Song of Homesickness,” Paek Kosan’s (1930–1997) “*Kyöljön ŭi killo*/Road to the Decisive Battle,” Kim Yöngyu’s (b. 1939) “*Mosijül samilp’o ŭi meari*/The Unforgettable Echo over Lake Samilp’o,” and Kang Yönggöl’s (b. 1932) “*Noül pikkin padaga*/Looking Out to Sea.” The first three feature a violin soloist and the fourth a cello soloist, and the scores I bought in Pyongyang give piano reductions for the orchestral parts.<sup>10</sup> The first takes an anonymous song of the same name reputedly written during the 1930s guerrilla struggle that in 1980 had also been developed as an orchestral piece by Ri Chöngön (1926–1996). The second sets a 1951 song by Kim Oksöng, and the third a more recent *yesul kayo* art song memorializing the guerrilla activities of Kim Jong Suk, the first wife of Kim Il Sung and the mother of Kim Jong Il, at a freshwater lake on the southern side of scenic Mount Kūmgang. Lake Samilp’o, as named in the title, is today known for its station, which sits just north of the border with South Korea on a railroad that runs down the coast—inconclusive discussions were held in the mid-1990s to reconnect the line across the border to facilitate South Korean tourism to Mount Kūmgang in the North. Kim Jong Suk had purportedly led a women’s guerrilla group during the late 1930s much further north in the Mount Paektu area, where she met Kim Il Sung, but in this telling, she pushed southward to engage the Japanese military. The fourth sets a song shared with the revolutionary opera “A True Daughter of the Party” as well as a 1979 orchestral composition by Ri Chöngön and Kim Yunbong (b. 1933).



Moderato elegante

The image displays three systems of musical notation for a violin and piano ensemble. The first system shows the violin melody in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time, marked 'Moderato elegante' and 'mp'. The piano accompaniment is marked 'p'. The second system continues the melody, with the piano part featuring a 'mp' dynamic. The third system concludes the excerpt with a double bar line and a '(...etc)' annotation. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

**Notation 8.3** Pak Minhyök's (1922–1988) "*Sahyangga*/Song of Homesickness," first melody statement on the violin. Excerpt from score for violin and piano (1985).

The melody of "Song of Homesickness" comprises two sets of four two-bar phrases, each set building in volume and rising in pitch through three phrases and falling away in the fourth. The final phrase extends to a cadence. It is always sung slowly and reverently, because its subject is the young Kim Il Sung, watching his mother weep on the veranda of their Manchurian hovel, longing for the family home near Pyongyang from which she fled into exile. The composition opens with the orchestra harmonizing the first four phrases of the song; the fifth phrase arrives softly, in a high octave; and the sixth falls loudly, with the bass taking over. Notation 8.3 enters at this point, as the violin soloist plays the exact melody of the original song. The melody is repeated again, a horn giving the first three phrases with the soloist offering contrapuntal answers to each, never blurring the melody. The soloist then takes over the melody, and from the half-way point the melody switches between orchestra

and violin. Contrapuntal lines mark out the violin part when the orchestra has the melody, but these never threaten the melody. The composition is in D major, but switches to D minor for a development section that ends with an extended violin cadenza resolving back to D major. The recapitulation offers two restatements of the melody, the first elaborately marked by massive chords and arpeggios, and the second returning to a *pianissimo* violin statement that once more briefly switches between major and minor, returning us to a fleeting image of Kim’s mother looking out from the veranda.

Ri Chŏngŏn’s orchestral arrangement of the same song, published in *Chosŏn ūmak chŏnjip* 9 (1991, 238–61), is set in G major and opens with an eight-bar introduction in which shimmering strings provide a background for harp, clarinet, and synthesizer arpeggios. The introduction concludes with a standard V-I perfect cadence, and then the song melody proper commences, played on xylophone and synthesizer, with each phrase answered by a descending accordion line. The orchestral strings repeat the melody, now with percussion articulation, and wind instruments join for the fourth phrase. There is a brief development section, then the orchestra recaps the melody, *tutti*. Calm is restored as a final repeat of the fourth through eighth phrases substitutes for a conclusion—again, this returns us to a fleeting image of Kim’s mother yearning for her home.<sup>11</sup>

“Road to the Decisive Battle” is, in the version published in 1985, cast in a solid F minor, the opening orchestral phrase alternating tonic and dominant chords derived from the song melody. The orchestra maintains similar textures throughout. A fast tempo encourages the violin to introduce double stops as it repeats the piano’s opening phrase, and a brief cadenza elongates the fourth and fifth bars. Then the full melody is heard. “Looking Out to Sea” starts lugubriously with nine bars of solo cello, a cadenza extending from this point, *pizzicato* chords giving way to *arco* double and triple stops. A slow 4/4 sets the scene, but all changes as the orchestra enters with a familiar foxtrot-derived bass lifted from 1930s’ popular songs. This subsides into a second full melody statement. The same sameness is found elsewhere, including in so-called “light music” (*kyŏng ūmak*) arrangements—many are included in volumes 13 (1997) and 14 (1998) of *Chosŏn ūmak chŏnjip*.

### Upscaling songs . . .

Orchestras, though, need more than song arrangements. Thought was given to how to extend these simple structures, and the answer was to map songs

to Soviet tone poems, so that compositions painted seeds and messages between statements of song melodies. Compositions that take Ri Myönsang's "*Mun'gyöng kogae/Mun'gyöng Pass*," a song written in 1950 to commemorate one of the first major battles of the Korean War (often known as the Battle of Sangju), illustrate this. On a mountain track some 45 miles north of Taegu in the last week of July 1950, as North Korean troops swept south, they met the recently arrived and poorly prepared United States' Twenty-Fifth Infantry Division. When the Americans retreated, the confidence of northern forces was bolstered, because they had overcome the rump of an army that just five years before had defeated Japan.<sup>12</sup> Compositions based on the song exist in a number of instrumental and orchestral settings, and there are also arrangements for large choirs and for pop bands, including today's all-girl Moranbong.<sup>13</sup> Cast in a solemn A minor, Ri's original song consists of two sets of four phrases, each of the first comprising four 3/4 bars, and the second featuring two short phrases that build tension and two longer phrases that resolve it. The 1973 orchestral work by Kim Kilhak (1923–1993), which also exists for wind orchestra,<sup>14</sup> opens with a 20-bar introduction that lifts elements from the melody but constantly shifts meters between 2/4, 3/4, and 4/4 to establish an edgy, urgent atmosphere. The strings introduce a full statement of Ri's melody, in A minor, with brief woodwind answers bridging from one phrase to the next. The first four phrases are then repeated on flute and clarinet, the strings taking over for six bars before a flautist completes the statement. The battle starts with a development section marked *agitato* (bar 78), building to a fast *allegro* with triplets against duplets, modulating through D minor to E minor. The battle appears won when a false recapitulation in A minor starts, the *fortissimo* melody now slow and ponderous (bar 145). Tension, though, builds again, until at bar 210 the melody reasserts itself, *fortissimo*, slow but triumphant. This is the point where the Americans retreat, leading to a recapitulation of the melody that stops at its penultimate phrase. We hear a tonic-dominant cadence (bar 230), then a pause that marks the victory. Violins complete the melody statement, only for a *tutti* cadential passage to interrupt them, indicating this is but one skirmish in what will be a protracted conflict. The piece continues for a further 12 bars.

Ri's "*Nuni naerinda/Snow Falls*" (1965; see Chapters 1 and 7) has proved a popular subject.<sup>15</sup> The lyrics remember the women's volunteer force of the 1930s, gathered on Mount Paektu, raising flags and marching out to engage the Japanese aggressors. This was a force led in some later tellings by Kim Jong Suk, Kim Il Sung's first wife and Kim Jong Il's mother. The song encourages melancholic interpretations: snow falls in the depth of the night, and the

volunteers are camped far from home, occupying barely adequate hide-outs. And the lyrics encourage settings that build to a military march, reflecting the steely determination of the volunteers. In 1979, Kim Yŏnggyu (1927–1989) penned an orchestral version that mixed national with Western instruments. This was published in *Chosŏn ūmak chŏnjip* 8 (1991, 427–64). Similar to other ensemble and orchestral versions, Kim sets the scene with a short, ethereal introduction played on strings, harp, and vibraphone. Violins start the melody in bar 6, and second and third statements are given from bar 18 onward on national flutes (*tanso* and *chŏdae*), and from bar 31 by the full string section. An *allegro* middle section, built from elements of the melody, begins in bar 44, still anchored within the E minor that has proven unmovable since the introduction. This leads to a *fortissimo* climax, descending chromatically (bar 121). A B-minor march commences at bar 141, its melody derived from the song’s third phrase. The full song melody returns, triumphant but now in G minor (bar 209), which dissolves in a six-bar codetta that brings resolution.

Several composers have been mentioned in the above paragraphs. Ri Chŏngŏn and Pak Minhyŏk were born in Hamgyŏng Province to the east, Kim Yunbung and Kim Kilhak in P’yŏngan Province to the west, and Paek Kosan in Pyongyang. Ri came from a farming family, but by 1946 he was enrolled in a business school in Seoul. He trained as a singer (a bass) and an educator. During the Korean War he moved to Pyongyang, where he joined the National Arts Theater. In 1954, after a short period in China, he took over as head of the theater section for the Korean Musicians’ Union, and by 1962 he had been made a merit artist. Titles of his early songs show consistent support for the regime: “*Paektusan*/Mount Paektu,” “*Chosŏn ūi ssaunda*/Struggle of Korea,” “*Sŭngnirŭl hyanghayŏ*/Facing Victory.” By the 1970s he was composing with the Sea of Blood Opera Company. Pak left for Tokyo to study violin in 1940. He returned to Hamgyŏng in 1948 after spending a period playing in a Seoul theater. By 1951 he had joined the Korean People’s Army orchestra, becoming its director in 1961. Many of his pieces are for wind orchestra, although he also wrote songs. He was appointed merit artist in 1964.

Kim Yunbung spent much of his childhood in China. He took up the trumpet when he returned to his natal Shinŭiju on the northwestern border in 1946, and he spent the war years in a choral ensemble. He joined the National Arts Theater in 1955, then entered Pyongyang Music College. He graduated in 1961 and was sent to Moscow for further training in 1964. By 1984 he was a people’s artist. Kim Kilhak enrolled at a business school in Pyongyang in 1935, but briefly traveled to Japan to study music in 1942. A lack of funds

forced a speedy return, and by the time the Korean War broke out he was teaching music at a school in Hwanghae Province. When the armistice was signed in 1953, he was chair of the local musicians' union in Namp'o to the southwest of Pyongyang, and by October that same year he had been promoted to the national union's committee. He was appointed merit artist in 1962 and people's artist in 1982. Again, Paek was introduced to the violin at the age of four, and thereafter studied in Pyongyang, but also in China and Japan, graduating in Harbin in 1946. He returned to a performing position in Pyongyang in 1951, and was sent to Moscow for further training. Although back in Pyongyang in 1954, he won prizes in Moscow in 1957 and Prague in 1958. Later, appointed first a merit and then a people's artist, he worked as violinist and composer with the Mansudae Art Troupe. Lastly, Kim Yŏnggyu and Kim Yŏngyu both hailed from Seoul. Kim Yŏnggyu trained and worked there until he moved northward during the Korean war, and he later composed for the operas "Sea of Blood," "The Flower Girl," and "Oh! Tell," as well as for "Yŏnp'ung Lake." Kim Yŏngyu graduated from Pyongyang Music and Dance College in 1963. His songs, with suitably ideological titles and lyrics about the army, people's happiness, and so on, began to circulate a couple of years before 1963, and during the 1970s he worked with both the Mansudae Art Troupe and the Sea of Blood Opera Company. He was rewarded by appointments as a merit then a people's artist.

### ... Back to symphonies

A tone poem is cast in a single movement, but symphonies, as the bread and butter of national orchestras and as works that mark out an orchestra's achievement, must be more expansive. A form was therefore needed to further upscale song structures by linking a series of movements. So, in 1973, Kim Yŏnggyu joined Kim Yunbung to write a symphony based on the revolutionary opera "Sea of Blood."<sup>16</sup> The opera had premiered two years earlier. Again, in 1985, Kim Yŏngyu joined the P'yŏngan-born Kang Kich'ang (b. 1934) to compose a "Flower Girl" symphony. Each movement of both symphonies takes a specific element from the donor opera, painting scenes but retaining the melodies of key songs that foreground the ideological seeds. In "Sea of Blood," the first movement sets the scene, taking as its basis the core song, "*P'i padaga*/Song of Sea of Blood." The second zooms in on the song originally written for the film made prior to the opera, "I Keep My Red Spirit

Single-Heartedly,” and the third depicts how villagers rise up to fight alongside guerrillas and triumph over the Japanese (“*Hyŏngmyŏng ŭi kich’i*/Flag of Revolution”). “The Flower Girl” has four movements, “*Kkot sashio*/Selling Flowers,” “*Kkotkwa kach’i p’iyŏnan chŏngsŏng*/Like Flowers, Blooming Whole-Heartedly,” “*Ŏmŏni ŭi ch’ugŭm*/Mother’s Death,” and “*Hyŏngmyŏng ŭi kkotssiasŭl ppuryŏgandane*/The Flowers of Revolution Have Taken Root.”

Both symphonies are scored for Western orchestras but add national flutes (the *tanso* and three sizes of *chŏdae*). In essence, scene painting allows a movement to extend beyond the confines of a song’s short melody. The second movement of “Sea of Blood” illustrates the blueprint: a short introduction, the song melody heard on winds plus violins (bar 8), a repeat of the melody by full orchestra (bar 24), a development section based on the opening ascending melodic phrase building to an *allegro*, a *fortissimo* climax (the latter, at bar 90), and a recapitulation of the melody played in strident octaves (bar 104). Each melody statement retains the G-minor key. Scene painting is at its most developed in the first movement, which portrays the oppression of Koreans as their village is set ablaze by the Japanese. The introduction, in A minor, reproduces the first, questioning, leitmotif of the core song before recapitulating elements from the opera’s overture. A modulation to A major announces the song (bar 27). Then, the pace builds as the second, answering, leitmotif of the core song is explored (bars 60–83), subsiding to the familiar lullaby, “*Chajangga*” (beginning at bar 84). The movement ends with a restatement of the core song, again in A major (bar 140). The third movement is built around the opera’s march, signaling and painting the revolution and building to a suitable climax. Within this, though, the core theme returns, as a lyrical centerpiece (bars 138–75). “The Flower Girl” symphony adopts much the same approach. The opera’s core song appears in the first movement at bar 18, played on solo *chŏdae* flute, and is repeated in fuller orchestration from bar 34 onward. The slow, mournful third movement paints sadness and loss as Mother dies. And the final movement is a suitably militaristic 4/4 march, except for that most famous offstage chorus, “Every Spring,” which breaks through in a triumphant 3/4 statement (bar 133).

### Isang Yun, from South to North

The most celebrated Korean composer of the twentieth century was Isang Yun (1917–1995). Although from the mid-1950s resident in Berlin, in later years he was a regular visitor to Pyongyang, where he was allocated a house

near the diplomatic quarter. Marking his importance, the Isang Yun Music Research Institute was established in 1979—Ri Kõnu worked there in his last years alongside other composers and two divisions of musicologists and musicians devoted, respectively, to national music and Western music. The institute produced a journal, known initially as *Ŭmak yõng'u* (*Music Study*) and later as *Ŭmak segye* (*Music World*), which returned to territory previously occupied by *Chosõn ŭmak*, including analyses of twentieth-century instrumental and orchestral music, in addition to the standard reviews of songs and song performances. The institute also sponsored an annual festival of Yun's music, and held occasional academic conferences. It was closed in 1994, following the death of Kim Il Sung; Yun was criticized for not attending Kim's funeral, although he had been hospitalized for much of the year and was unable to travel to Pyongyang until November (when he dutifully laid a wreath before Kim's massive bronze statue; as reported in the *Pyongyang Times*, November 26, 1994). The mid-1990s were, though, difficult times, and when the institute reopened after Yun's own death, in 1997, it lost much of its profile and prestige, its journal now in the main reporting and reviewing events.

Yun had been born in Korea's southeast. His hometown was T'ongyõng, South Kyõngsan Province, in today's South Korea. The graves of his ancestors were there and, keeping tradition, that was where he would hope to be buried. He grew up in an aristocratic family and learned Western music. He went to Japan, where he studied cello and composition, first in Osaka (1935–1937) and then with Tomojirõ Ikenouchi in Tokyo (1939–1941). Back in Korea, he first taught in the southeast, writing, among other pieces, the school song still used at T'ongyõng Girls' High School. He was appointed to a post at Seoul National University in 1953. Before then, in 1950, five of his *yesul kayo* art songs, conforming to the style fashionable at the end of the colonial period, were published under the title "*Talmuri*/The Moon's Halo."<sup>17</sup> These compare with the genre as it evolved with Ri Myõnsang and others in Pyongyang; in general they are more advanced, to the extent that they feature more regular modulations (some hinted at, some fully worked out), considerable chromaticism, and an extensive and varied range of piano techniques. For example, "*Talmuri*," one of the five, is in a solid B minor, but plays with shifts between  $g^\sharp$  and  $g^\natural$ , deriving, respectively, from the ascending and descending melodic minor scale. It hints at modulations to E minor. The fluid piano accompaniment flits between triadic chords, arpeggios, and filigree patterns. Also in the set, "*P'yõnji*/Letter" moves between A minor, E minor, and, briefly,  $A^\flat$  minor, while the introduction to "*Nagũne*/Wayfarer" opens with a series of ninth and eleventh chords that create a fluid tonality suited for



the song’s subject. The flexibility, the richness of the piano accompaniments, and the tonal contrasts suggest much promise. And that promise began to be fulfilled in a string quartet (1955) and piano trio (1956).

Yun was awarded the Seoul Prize, and this allowed him to travel to Paris in 1956 to study European avant-garde composition. He soon moved to Germany, where he learned serialism from Josef Rufer and Boris Blacher. He had actually encountered Rufer’s text, *Die Komposition mit zwölf Tönen* (Composition with Twelve Tones), in Japanese translation back in East Asia, where it had been published in 1954, and he used serialism—which as an avant-garde technique distant from socialist realism never became part of the North Korean musical vocabulary—in works such as “Musik für sieben Instrumente” (1959) and his Third String Quartet (1959). He felt, though, that strict serialism stifled creativity, and looked back to Korea for a different inspiration, finding it, in 1963, in two discrete places. First, on his first trip to North Korea, he encountered tomb paintings of four mythical animals in the largest of the late Koguryō period (550–660 CE) Kangsō chambers: a blue dragon, black turtle/serpent, white tiger, and red phoenix (Rinser 2010, 108–12). Today, the Kangsō tomb complex is a UNESCO World Heritage Site as well as a National Property of North Korea. Second, to help him produce a set of two radio programs for WDR Köln in 1963, “Musik und Instrumente des alten Korea,” he requested a set of LPs of traditional court and literati music be sent from Seoul. These featured musicians associated with the National Gugak Center, the successor to court music institutes stretching back many centuries. According to his sound engineer in Berlin, Wolfgang Viewig, Yun treasured these LPs for many years (personal communication, September 1997). Two observations are pertinent. First, during the colonial period, court institute activities were limited. Further decline in the immediate postwar years, followed by a forced decampment to a small building in the Pusan enclave during the Korean War, meant that few Koreans experienced court music in concert. Also, given that it constituted part of the failure of precolonial Korea, many of those working with Western music rejected it. Although some have argued to the contrary, there is little reason to suppose Yun had much knowledge of it. Second, in the 1950s, notably at the new music festivals of Darmstadt and elsewhere, and including at their American equivalents, Asian composers such as Yun, but also the Chinese Chou Wen-chung (1923–2019), the Filipino José Maceda (1917–2004), and the Japanese Tōru Takemitsu (1930–1996), were encouraged by Western mentors to find personal voices resonant with their homelands.<sup>18</sup> Yun, then, was not alone in doing so.



In Germany, creating innovative new music attracted commissions; indeed, the musical avant-garde was embraced as part of post-1945 Cold War politics (Carroll 2003; Beal 2006; Adlington 2013b, 87–95).<sup>19</sup> As Yun found a personal language, he gained both success and moderate financial security, and a group of musicians, publishers, and intellectuals coalesced around him. Central to this language was a technique he termed *Haupttöne*, a focus on central tones. In East Asian court music, tones have identity independent of melodic context, an identity enhanced by ornamentation and dynamic shifts. Yun expanded ornament complexes into long, elastic melodic fragments—a “microcosm within a macrocosm” was how he explained it in a 1993 lecture. He divided ensembles into three blocks of soft and steady strings, brash and thrusting brass, and flickering, uneasy woodwind. He also subjugated structure to a Taoist perception of flow—the notion of tapping into a sonic stream at a certain point and exiting it at another point. This notion meant that, although some pieces have titles, he favored absolute music.<sup>20</sup> And he constructed sonic images drawn from Korean tradition, particularly court music—drum and clapper strikes, ornaments, breathy noise, the sound that silk strings produce when plucked—so that, to Western audiences, he became a Korean composer. But, since his sonic borrowings were devoid of context, to Korean audiences he remained a Western composer (Howard 1999).

Yun’s music sits far removed from socialist realism. It is rarely lyrical, since ornamentation, elaborated through *Haupttöne*, trumps melodic flow. His characteristic use of sound blocks evades familiar tonality. But, while his music has little in common with the artistic conventions of North Korea, once settled in Berlin and after a military dictatorship took control in Seoul, he became more political (Rinser 2010, 158).<sup>21</sup> He took on an oversight role for South Koreans resident in Germany, many of whom worked as miners under restrictive contracts negotiated by the southern government to generate foreign currency.<sup>22</sup> Like many others, he would cross to East Berlin, because it offered cheap shopping, but there he made contact with North Korean diplomats. He visited North Korea in 1963, at the invitation of an old friend. Then, in 1967, as part of a clampdown ordered by Seoul, he was tricked into visiting the South Korean consulate and was kidnapped—held against his will, drugged, forcibly taken back to Seoul, and imprisoned.<sup>23</sup> Tried on charges of sedition and treason, prosecutors demanded the death penalty, but he was sentenced to life imprisonment. His wife, Yi Suja, was similarly tricked into returning, and she was imprisoned and given a three-year sentence.<sup>24</sup> A campaign was mounted by his circle of friends in Germany, and a

petition for his release was signed by Hans Werner Henze, Mauricio Kagel, Herbert von Karajan, Ernst Krenek, György Ligeti, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Igor Stravinsky, and many other distinguished musical figures. Removed to hospital to recover from injuries as a "wounded dragon," he was released in 1969. He never returned to South Korea.<sup>25</sup>

Yun's abduction provided an excuse for North Korea to adopt and celebrate him. But it did so on its own terms: the institute's journal rarely offered details about his compositions, although it did carry photographs of his visits, lectures, and so on. More importantly, in 1992 and 1993, Yun became the subject of four films in the series *Minjokkwa unmyŏng* (Nation and Destiny), "*Yun sangmin/Commoner Yun*" (parts 5 and 14–16). These mixed fact and fiction as they sought to portray clear ideological messages, and although Yun was present at the premiere of the first part, he kept his silence, knowing the likely repercussions were he to be critical, even though the fictionalized story surely concerned him.<sup>26</sup> Kim Jong Il intended the film series to be the longest ever produced, and it eventually reached 62 parts.<sup>27</sup> Influenced by director Yamada Yōji's (b. 1931) Japanese series "*Otoko wa Tsurai yo/It's Tough Being a Man*," which had begun in 1969 and was about a single character unsuccessful in love,<sup>28</sup> the Korean series tells of valor and dedication. Each part commences with images of peasants being marched into exile during the Korean War, fading to Kim Jong Il's handwritten comment that the song "*Nae nara chaeillo choha/My Country Is the Best*" reflects the reality of North Korea.

Part 5, the first of the four about Yun, starts in the present day (that is, 1992). Echoing the opening of "The Flower Girl," Yun, played by the actor Sŏ Kyŏngsŏp, and his wife frolic in a field of wild flowers on a hillside outside Pyongyang. Children play. He remarks, much as in the 1949 film "My Hometown" or the songs "Embrace of the Motherland" and "Snow Falls," or the opera "Sea of Blood," "This country really is the best. My place of exile is not my home." The scene cuts to the mid-1960s, and the struggles of Korean guest workers<sup>29</sup> in Germany, his place of "exile." Yun petitions the South Korean ambassador, but word gets back to the general-turned-president Park Chung Hee in Seoul. Park's wife is superstitious,<sup>30</sup> and tells him astrologers have announced this is a dangerous time to overlook dissent, so Park orders Yun's kidnapping. Much of the film matches what actually happened, except that Yun is sentenced to death, and he writes a symphony in prison that his wife is blocked from taking back to Germany. In reality, in prison he completed the second in a set of two one-movement chamber operas, the set titled "Träume/Dreams," which premiered in Nuremberg in February 1969.<sup>31</sup> In the film, his wife crafts a flower from her hair but, unable to give it to him

personally, gets the head woman jailor, Ri Sukcha, to pass it to him. In the present day, the film shows Yun jubilantly piecing together torn scraps of manuscript to finish his “fifth symphony,” a “symphony of indignation.” It is Tchaikovskian with hints of Rachmaninov, even as he announces it comes from the *minjok*, the Korean people. It is performed to acclaim, even though what we hear is completely alien to Yun’s actual music. And rather than relating to Yun’s real Fifth Symphony (1987), which was dedicated to world peace, his reflections on imprisonment came in a different composition, his Concerto for Cello and Orchestra (1976).

More acclaimed performances in Paris, Vienna, Sydney, and Osaka open Part 14 (the second film about Yun). The new general-turned-president of South Korea, the balding, bespectacled Chun Doo Hwan, asks Yun to return for a concert to celebrate the upcoming Seoul Olympic Games. Chun, though, cemented his power by violently suppressing a citizen’s revolt in the southwestern city of Kwangju,<sup>32</sup> and Yun has recently completed a work giving voice to Kwangju’s oppressed citizens, “Exemplum: In Memoriam Kwangju” (1981). In real life, this piece was commissioned by WDR Köln, and premiered in Köln in May 1981, receiving its first Pyongyang performance in August 1982. Music, but not a single note taken from Yun’s piece, accompanies images of soldiers beating and killing, juxtaposed with Chun visiting a temple where monks remind him that Buddhism’s fundamental rule is not to harm living beings. The film turns to fiction: Yun, in Berlin, has become guardian to two children of a colleague shot on Park’s orders—a colleague Yun could have saved by admitting his own guilt of associating with North Koreans in East Berlin—but the adopted son, now a young adult, is dating a fun-loving German girl. The adopted son may reflect the difficult relationship Yun had with his real son, Ugiong. Neither of his two children, Ugiong and Djong, appear in the film; in the real world, they remained in Korea when Yun left for Europe, but joined Yun in Berlin in July 1964. In the film, Yun argues with his adopted son that Koreans should be conservative and moral, identifying as citizens of the motherland. Meanwhile, a homecoming concert is being planned for him in Seoul, directed by his student Chöngsu. A further fictional story emerges: Yun’s four-year-old son had been kidnapped long before on the orders of a childless businessman, Kwak, by a go-between, who—spoiler alert—was the jailor Ri Sukcha in her mob years. The son’s former nanny is organizing the concert. Yun has lost hope of ever finding his son. Meanwhile, Chun owes Kwak his life, because Kwak had bribed the Americans during the Vietnam War, paying US\$100,000 so the corrupt Chun would not be court-martialed.

Yun decides to return to Korea, but to the North, to hold a reunification concert. Parts 15 and 16 (the third and fourth parts) develop the fiction. The adopted son leaves Yun's house to live as a German low-life, rejecting his Korean motherland. Chöngsu refuses to conduct Yun's concert, because the South Korean government opposes reunification.<sup>33</sup> Yun is left without a son and without a disciple. Ri Sukcha visits Yun, revealing she knows where his long-lost son is. Yun's wife persuades Chöngsu to visit Ri in Seoul to find out more.<sup>34</sup> In a drunken stupor Ri reveals to Chöngsu that he is Yun's son. She whispers a lie, “Yun had no money to travel to Europe, so sold you. He sold you to gain his own fame.” Chöngsu phones Yun, saying, “Your son is alive, but dead in spirit, because you sold him.” Later, drunk, he calls Yun again, singing a song Yun taught him when he was four, revealing his identity. He rebukes Yun: “A man who stands like a gigantic statue is nothing but a mirage.” Yun is devastated.

Yun travels to Pyongyang for the reunification concert, at which his choral piece “*Na ŭi ttang, na ŭi minjogiyŏ*/My Land, My People” is premiered. In reality, the concert for reunification went ahead only in 1990, after Chun had left office, and three years after “My Land, My People” had been premiered on October 5, 1987.<sup>35</sup> In the film, Chun reads of its premiere and tells his security service—colloquially known as the An'gibu<sup>36</sup>—to destroy Yun. Security officers harness Chöngsu's anger, forcing him to call a press conference at which he reveals his past. Yun collapses: “I was born in South Korea but can no longer go there. Where is my motherland?” Kwak, meanwhile, confronts Chun, who refuses to back down, despite his debt to Kwak; Kwak sends his lackeys to kill Ri, but before she dies she confesses the truth to Chöngsu, who, in turn, sees he has been tricked. He tries to leave Seoul to reconcile with Yun in Berlin. An'gibu officers stop him. “Mean bastards!” he shouts, “How can I call South Korea my motherland?” Chun tries once more to persuade Yun to return, but Yun insists Chun must first accept he has massacred his own citizens in Kwangju. The film ends as Yun announces, “A musician who is not concerned with the nation's destiny cannot be considered an artist.”

“*Yun Sangmin*” creates an imaginary composer who is an exemplary proletarian, a mix, as discussed in Chapter 5 in respect to revolutionary operas, of a real-life character of distinction and a constructed embodiment of the socialist ideal. But, to reiterate, Yun's music is distant from anything permissible in North Korea. The consequence is that the films contain no music by Yun. Three works he supposedly wrote are performed but, still, not one note is by him. Three other composers are credited with the soundtrack for all four parts (Ri Chongo, Söng Tongch'un, and Ko Suyöng), with others contributing

segments (Chŏn Ch'angil, Kim Yöngsŏn, Kim Ch'anggöl, and Ku Sünghae). How, then, can Yun be celebrated in Pyongyang, when his music is not ideologically acceptable? Not only does his complex, avant-garde style exceed what is allowed, but even his European mentors once told him to simplify it, and there were occasions when European musicians refused to play it (Rinser 2010, 101, 121–23). The annual festival held in his honor in Pyongyang did include his compositions, but not other avant-garde music; instead, it fell back on what was approved under Stalin in Soviet times, so that the 1989 festival, for example, juxtaposed a few Yun works with Beethoven, Bruch, Dvorak, and Tchaikovsky. It is questionable how many North Koreans have ever encountered his music; only a small number of the Pyongyang elite are invited to the festival, and I have found no evidence that his music has been broadcast.<sup>37</sup>

Yun did write two narrative pieces that pushed the political agenda approved by Pyongyang, “Exemplum” (1981) and “My Land, My People” (1987). Both have been recorded in Pyongyang (Camerata 32CM-69, 1988, cpo 999 047-2, n.d.).<sup>38</sup> Arguably, both pieces dilute his writing, although Hyejin Yi tries to be positive, writing how “Exemplum” embraces a straightforward symphonic structure using “textures and melodies sprinkled with iconic melodies and sound effects” (2017, 77). In an interview with me in October 1990, Yun remarked that South Koreans were not free to express their feelings, so, since he had been born on South Korean territory, “On behalf of the people, I am their humble servant. I enable their voices to be heard throughout the world.” To attempt this, he adapts his language, so that the Korean clappers, *pak*, favored from court music, now mimic gunshots, while tremolos, staccato notes, and filigree ornaments based on *Haupttöne* become representations of trauma. Programmatic sections, titled “fierce battle” and “people declare their fight for justice as a trumpet plays a fanfare,” come as “waves” (as Walter-Wolfgang Sparrer puts it in his program note) within a relentless texture rather than standing as discrete sections. The notion of melody is not that of a song, since different orchestral parts share fragments, although the piece is largely monodic. The multiple instances of *Haupttöne* always remain close to the tone *g* (with octave displacements). The piece opens with the full orchestra repeatedly sounding *g*, in unison, a complex rhythmic articulation suggesting agitation and fear. Later, brass instruments represent the military, while strings mark the citizens. Essentially, the texture is static, stacking (as is typical of Yun) major and minor thirds (atypical to Yun). A central segment tentatively moves a fraction up and down from the tone *g*, exploring a slowly evolving *F#m*<sup>7</sup> chord (*f#-a-c#-e*), but with the *Hauptton* rising to *a*, to mourn those who have been killed.

"My Land, My People" is an expansive four-movement work for full orchestra, choir, and soloists, evoking in size and form eighteenth-century tradition. It sets lyrics from nine poets and writers. Yun strips back his language, but one senses discomfort as he tries to embrace a more standard tonality around A. The texture is again static, using forceful dynamic shifts to sound revolution and to lament division—that is, the socialist revolution in North Korea, and the long-lasting division of North and South. The piece commences—with remnants of serialism—in the dominant (E major) but resolves to the tonic (A) in bar 10 as the choir joins in, sounding an open fifth (a + e) that omits the third (c/c♯), until a bass solo alternates c♯ (lament, A minor) and c♯ (revolution, A major). Flurries from orchestral horns ascend and descend before the choir attempts a stepwise melody, still far from a song, outlining an A-major triad (bar 21). Sudden changes in dynamics seem to be overplayed. The choir announces, *sprechstimme* and *fortissimo*, "Our race is one!" (*Uri kyörenün hanaida!*). The trauma of division builds around minor thirds (c♯ + e, etc.), gets stuck on an A<sup>7</sup> chord (a-c♯-e-g; bars 50–62), and concludes with a unison passage vacillating between major and minor: g-c♯-g♯-a. A languid second movement frames remnants of a soprano *yesul kayo* art song, "*Urinün tashi mannaya/We Will Meet Again*" (bar 65). The full movement and the explosive third movement are both titled "*Hyönshil/The Reality*." The finale, "*Mirae/The Future*," stubbornly hangs on to the static A<sup>7</sup> chord until at the very end the music rises a tone to end on a unison b, the choir shouting "Unification!" (*T'ongiriyō!*).

"My Land, My People" was designed to be performed in Pyongyang—it has little place in a European contemporary music festival. However, one of Yun's final works, "Engel in Flammen—Epilog" (1994), returns to the political agenda of "Exemplum" and to the overt programmatic approach of both earlier works, but consciously incorporates European avant-gardism.<sup>39</sup> Written when Yun knew he would never recover his failing health, it no longer needs to match ideology. It still rejects the politics of South Korea, but it also rejects the monochromaticism of *juche*. In its two contrasting sections, it offers a summation of the composer's life. First is a 16-minute movement for orchestra, "Engel in Flammen," in which Yun retains his three standard orchestral blocks, but pares them down. *Haupttöne* replace melodies, as strings open with a slowly rising theme. Brass chords bring contrast, and then woodwind flurries mark a slight accelerando. As in his contemporaneous Second Clarinet Quartet,<sup>40</sup> Yun is writing his biography. He returns to his youth, until the first climax, sustained from bar 40 to bar 72,

signifies his maturity. The coda includes his favorite imitation of court music, as percussion instruments bang out a cadential idea from the ancient Rite to Confucius (bars 168–70). His political narrative has not moved forward since “My Land, My People,” and, despite the arrival of democracy in South Korea, he provides a program note harking back to earlier times:

. . . “in Flammen” means burning, and to be precise, self-immolation. . . . I had in mind a scene that has happened many times in reality: pouring petrol over one’s body, setting light to oneself, and jumping from a high building while engulfed in flames. . . . To be precise, I had [in mind] the young people of South Korea, and the students who in spring 1991 repeatedly demonstrated, and whose protests were brutally and mercilessly repressed.

“Epilog” takes over, a picture of unmoving, serenely consonant, solitude. Yun chooses four of his favorite instruments (cello, violin, oboe, flute), adding a celesta, soprano, and chorus. The celesta adds color, and the soprano intones as if a Buddhist nun. This is Yun’s requiem, his own funeral service. It is music to be heard by dead souls rather than by those in the socialist North or the capitalist South. The music fades to imperceptibility, as the Taoist stream flows away. Yun has moved beyond Pyongyang. He has also, though, rejected *juche*, rejected song culture, and rejected the requirements placed on North Korean composers. He no longer needs a motherland.



## Songs for New Leaders

### Authorized pop

Totalitarian states seek to control the production of literature and art. Their state apparatuses, as Louis Althusser (1971) has it, are repressive, reinforcing the class state, collectivizing and institutionalizing nationhood, elevating paramount leaders, and claiming authority through the judicious promotion of historical facts, myths, and legends. They impose requirements on writers and artists to embed ideology in literature and art, including music and dance. They require the portrayal of a selective view of the past tinted by a nostalgia that may be real or manufactured, and a projection forward to an idealized and utopian future that will surely come if people remain faithful to the leadership and its ideology. The present is claimed to be in a permanent state of transition, while an imagined past serves the present by elevating elements of a shared heritage. Conservative and restrictive mechanisms censor production, and those appointed to control resist development and change, establish models, and thereby encourage repetition. But consistency in ideology, policy, and control is never a given; aspects are ignored or over time become the focus for approbation, while social compacts with interest groups, and with senior and junior citizens, are regularly realigned.

Songs become tools. Songs service the mass media, broadcasting ideology to the millions. Songs reinforce control, but if they can be made genuinely popular, they normalize authority. Songs generate change by altering social behavior, just as public displays of loyalty coerce compliance through mass spectacles, games, and festivals. Totalitarian states regard creators and performers—the writers, artists, musicians, and dancers—as workers for the state. They are rendered subservient to designated others—the people, audiences, and spectators (as they become part of spectacles)—who consume what is produced, and to the ruling elite who claim to represent consumers. There is little space for the Enlightenment individualism on which so much European discourse on art and literature has been built since the late eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup>



Jacques Attali reminds us how, “since noise is the source of power, power has always listened to it with fascination” (1985, 6). But commodified popular culture, as it has grown across the world with the rise of mass media and the growth of capitalism, has often been resisted by those in power. Hence Kim Jong Il, in *On the Art of Music*, warned his officials:

For the healthy development of mass music, we must prevent the infiltration of corrupt pop music and the like, and reject the slightest elements that stimulate vulgar and unhealthy hedonism, and eccentric and degenerate tastes. Only then is it possible to create noble mass music that meets the masses’ aspirations, is agreeable to their feelings, and can advance with the times. (2006 [1991], 377)

The musicologist Ri Ch’anggu echoed Kim in an interview with me in 1992:

All of our musicians agree that we should not create pop music such as rock and roll, since that would lead to trouble among our youth. It is not what our people want. Our people want to live in a healthy environment.

Such sentiments are not uncommon. Maxim Gorky, writing in *Pravda* on April 18, 1928, remarked, “Having listened to the caterwauling for a minute or two, one comes, willy-nilly, to the conclusion that this must be an orchestra of mental cases, driven mad by a carnal fixation” (cited in MacFadyen 2002, 1). Later, Khrushchev echoed this sentiment: “We are against cacophonous music . . . there is music that makes one feel like vomiting, and causes colic in one’s stomach.”<sup>2</sup>

Policing is only one side of the compact. The latter half of the twentieth century saw a second approach emerge as totalitarian states began, often tentatively, to embrace pop music, choosing what to accept and promote, and what to censor and reject. In North Korea, the perceived need to maintain the charisma and politics of the Kim dynastic leadership resisted the gradual routinization of bureaucracy that has characterized other totalitarian states (after Kwon and Chung 2012, 158–79; Cathcart, Green, and Denny 2014) but still sought to embrace pop. This was the logical result of the promotion of individual singers and actors in revolutionary operas, films, and other cultural productions as “little heroes.” So, much as state-sanctioned pop was promoted in many Soviet satellite states up to and through the 1980s,<sup>3</sup> 1983 saw the debut of North Korea’s first pop group: Wangjaesan Light Music

Band (Wangjaesan kyŏng ūmaktan). Wangjaesan released multiple albums through the sole state-owned media company under the special label WJS. The band's name came from a 1933 meeting of guerrillas presided over by Kim Il Sung at Mount Wangjae in North Hamgyŏng Province, while the light music tag reflected the familiar and commodified style of *taejung kayo*—popular songs descending from colonial times that feature a persistent fox-trot rhythm. As with *taejung kayo*, saxophones or a horn section would often form part of Wangjaesan's flexible line-up, even when the band migrated toward disco or provided the backing for close-mic'd star singers who seemingly nodded to 1960's American crooners. A second pop band arrived in 1985, Pochonbo Electronic Ensemble (Pochŏnbo chŏnja aktan), which released albums on the special (but to some unfortunately named<sup>4</sup>) PEE label. Named after the site of the 1937 battle led by Kim Il Sung, Pochonbo included, as its name suggests, electric guitars and synthesizers, but since these had to be imported from capitalist neighbors, brand names were covered or removed. Pochonbo assembled musicians who were to that point part of the massive Mansudae Art Troupe, and the unsurprising claim is that the band maintained the required superiority of Korean music over foreign soundworlds (Chŏng Ryongae 1992).

Both Korean bands, the official story goes, were established by Kim Jong Il. I have found no evidence to support the argument put forward by Lee Chor-u (cited in Korhonen and Cathcart 2017, 10), that both were initially established to entertain diplomats and foreign visitors, although much the same had been claimed for the Mansudae Art Troupe when it was founded in 1969. Both bands were functioning some years before the publication of Kim's *On the Art of Music*, with its concordat against pop and rejection of the saxophone—a further indication that Kim's discursive document was pieced together from earlier interventions, some of his own and some by others. In the 1980s and into the 1990s, both bands proved popular: in 1991 and later, Pochonbo toured Japan, performing to Korean Japanese audiences in sold-out venues,<sup>5</sup> and in 1992 I witnessed long queues waiting to buy tickets for a season of Wangjaesan performances in Pyongyang. The groups kick-started a commercial market for music that was soon considered to need policing, and in 1992 I was told the ticket price was 3 *wŏn* (at the official exchange rate, US\$1.50), about 10 percent of the then monthly wage for Pyongyang residents.<sup>6</sup>

Many texts explore pop as a strategy for resistance. As pop differentiates or bridges generational divides and reflects subcultural allegiances and

affiliations, it typically rubs against the regulated superculture (e.g., Sakolsky and Ho 1995). However, totalitarian states, both fascist and socialist, entangle pop and politics as they seek to harness its power while controlling its expression. This was the case, though neither uniformly nor continuously, in Czechoslovakia from the late 1940s onward (Mitchell 1992; Barrer 2006), in Bulgaria (Ashley 1994, 146–49), and in Albania (Tochka 2016, 21–54). In 1955 an East German minister remarked that pop music should not be left to people to develop as they wished, thereby encouraging state intervention (Wicke 1992a, 1992b, 81–87; Rauhut 1998; Hofmann 1999). The Soviet Union promoted *estrada* as an acceptable genre (Stites 1992; MacFadyen 2001, 2002) while, later, the post-Soviet Uzbek state continued with *estrada* and added updated versions of local traditions (Adams 2010, 7; Klenke, 2019). Many former satellite states sought to unmake Soviet cultural influence as the Soviet Union disintegrated (Ramet 1994, 1–14; Slobin 1996; Humphrey 2002; Rausing 2004, 42–70). State approval and resistance in respect to popular culture in China has been discussed by, among others, Brace (1991), Jones (1992, 35–63), Baranovitch (2003, 192–222), Wai-Chung Ho (2006), and de Kloet (2010, 180–90). Vuletic (2008) explores how the former Yugoslavia sanctioned pop for cultural diplomacy. Broadly, strategies for appropriation and control expand on Theodor Adorno’s (1972) critique of the mass culture industry, where “popular” is chimerical, created by others for widespread consumption. The strategies employed at state level can be seen in action in articles on Burma, Cuba, Iran, Lebanon, Mexico, and South Africa in *Shoot the Singer* (Korpe 2004). North Korea, then, is far from alone, even if its interventions have now persisted for longer than in many other states. But, to situate my discussion here, the rhetoric of dissent is certainly not a given, so pop music need not be the “imaginary of global capital encapsulated” (Chun, Rossiter, and Shoesmith 2004, 5).

### Pop as state telegraph

The songs of Pochonbo and Wangjaesan serviced ideology. They kept seeds intact, incorporating the official past and looking to the utopian future. They disseminated messages from the Korean Workers’ Party. Pop, then, in North Korea continued the song tradition. Yearbooks published lyrics and melodies,<sup>7</sup> supplemented by dedicated songbooks (such as Ro Ikhwa 1993). When songs were released, the mass media ensured they reached people quickly,

and, as a result, they acted as a state telegraph. Taking a snapshot from the beginning of the 1990s, the last years of Kim Il Sung's rule, illustrates this. Wangjaesan's second album (P'yöngyang K909593, 1991) promotes the then imminent transfer of power to Kim Jong Il, the father as the sun and the son as the star (or, with a nod to Mao Zedong, as the moon, reflecting the sun). Hence "*Haewabyöl pinnanün naüi chogugiyö*/Oh, My Homeland Bright under the Sun and Star," with lyrics by Li Chaerin and music by an anonymous group of composers, runs:

My homeland was born as the grateful sun rose,  
The kindly star brightens all this land;  
Oh! Under the sun and star,  
My homeland blooms as a communist paradise.

Another song on the album, "*Yöngwönhan pomirose*/Oh! Everlasting Spring," with lyrics by Chön Pyönggu and music by Kim Chaesön, ties both father and son, Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, to industrial production in the phrase "silk reels and molten iron flow," and to rural development with "the dear villages bloom in bliss." It claims North Korea to be a paradise built by father and son: "The sun and star are so clean that my country is nice to live in." While the first two of these phrases reference Kim Il Sung's on-the-spot guidance, it is tempting to see the latter as a riposte to the worldwide release of satellite images showing South Korea at night full of light but North Korea as a dark, black desert.<sup>8</sup>

The album promotes the omnipresent benevolence of both father and son. "*Uri üi haewa pyöl*/Our Sun and Star," with words by Shin Unho and music by Ri Chongo, reminds people that

The bright sun has no shadow, the bright star no shade,  
The sunlight is so warm that life blossoms,  
Warm, warm are our sun and star.

Pochonbo preached from the same hymnbook. Volume 29 (PEE-C-1034, 1991) supplements texts about Kim father and Kim son, such as "*Haebijül pyölbijül kasüme ango*/With Sunlight and Starlight at Heart," with songs about a land that is developing steadily and treading a well-ordered path in, for example, "*Chönjabyönggwa chönyö*/Tankers and Girls." The album also includes the evergreen "*Pan'gapsümnida*/We Are Glad," written by Ri

Chongo, which years later would be used alongside "*Tashi mannappshida/See You Again*," composed by Hwang Chinyŏng for Pochonbo in 1992, to top and tail both the "*Arirang*" festivals and the February 2018 performances by the Samjiyŏn troupe at the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics.

Wangjaesan's fourth album (Meari K2093, 1992) shifts territory, alerting people to the collapse of socialism elsewhere. People had belatedly been told that East Germany had ceased to exist, and, in an effort to turn the reasons behind failing Soviet satellite states to Pyongyang's advantage, songs reiterate the credentials of the leadership and the party. "*Kŭ midŭm hanaimyŏn/As You Trust Me So*" and "*Kŭdaebakke ne mollara/Only You I Know*" proclaim that the people cannot exist without Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, while "*Ojik uri tangman ttarŭri/Only Following Our Party*" and "*Rodong tangŭn inmin ŭi tang/The Worker's Party, Party for the People*" urge citizens to renew their allegiance to the socialist dream. Significantly, the album proclaims that socialism is the only way for North Korea if prosperity is to come in the future. The most important song, then, is "*Sahoe chuŭinŭn uri kŏya/Socialism Is Ours*," with words and music by Ryu Yongnam:

We go straight along the path we have chosen,  
 Though others forsake, we remain faithful.  
     Socialism is ours, socialism is ours,  
     Socialism defended by our Party's red flag is ours.  
 We'll never follow others' styles and fashions  
 We'll be firm even though the wind blows.

Solidly in the old *taejung kayo* mold, this song begins with a long instrumental, with phrases ending with upward flurries on synthesizers, and each stanza underpinned by the persistent foxtrot rhythm. Two other songs on the album hammer the same message home, telling people that North Korea is now the beacon of socialism for the world:

As the pine with deeply nourished roots is clothed in green even in the  
     falling snow,  
 Our Party strikes its roots among the people.  
 Oh, my country, my socialist country,  
 You will be firm, as the Party exists for the people! ("*Chogugiyŏ kŭdaega  
     kukkŏnhan kŏsŭn/Firm Is My Country*"; words by Han Kwanho, music  
 by Pak Chinguk)

Look at the world, then you will know:  
 Where does the red flag fly higher?  
 The high-rising Tower of Juche in the heart of the world,  
 Oh, it's my country, my country! ("*Sesangül parabora*/Look at the World";  
 words by Mun Kich'ang, music by Ryang Yongch'öl)

By 1992, though, storm clouds were gathering over the country. Looking back, signs of difficulty had begun to appear in the 1970s, when the reliance on heavy industry and collectivized agriculture began to be an obstacle to diversification, particularly given the impossibility of breaking from Kim Il Sung's on-the-spot guidance. The partition of production into units, and sclerotic central decision-making and planning, maintained control but impeded different parts of the supply chain linking together these elements. It became difficult to find what in earlier years had been celebrated as Stakhanovite or Kim Hoeilian feats of amazing worker productivity (as discussed in Chapter 1). The pace of development slowed. North Korean GNP was probably greater than that of South Korea until around 1973, but Pyongyang's overall trade had been in deficit for all but two years since its founding (Foster-Carter 1992, 21–22). By 1990 rapid changes in the Soviet Union began to adversely impact North Korea, which had long relied on barter trade rather than cash both for oil imports across the short 19-kilometer land border with the Soviet Far East and for imports of advanced technology. A rapprochement between China and South Korea began with the 1988 Seoul Olympics and the 1990 Beijing Asian Games, and this, too, reduced the North's room to maneuver. South Korea established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in 1990, and with China in 1992, and both of Pyongyang's former allies began to demand payment in hard currency for goods.

Then natural disasters came, including drought, a tidal wave on the East Coast, typhoons, and devastating floods. Forest clearances on hillsides led to alluvial soils being washed away, and as fuel shortages bit, ever more trees were cut and burned, worsening the country's plight. The boundaries of fields, in the name of agricultural collectivization (or, as is said by some in South Korea, to avoid future claims by those who had migrated southward before and during the Korean War), had been redrawn, altering the paths of streams and drainage courses. Soil had been depleted by years of chemical fertilizer overuse. Agricultural land was ruined and crops destroyed, rail arteries were severed, and bridges washed away. Tractors seized up as supplies of parts slowed, taking agriculture back to the days before mechanization,

to ox carts and crippling manual labor. Factories wound down production, and ever-more shrill go-faster speed campaigns were ignored as vital machinery was stripped out and sold for scrap. Hard data is difficult to find, but through the 1990s, as North Korea struggled with its “arduous march” or “march of suffering” (*konan ūi haenggun*), the economy contracted between 3 and 5 percent annually.<sup>9</sup>

Kim Il Sung died in 1994. Shock gave way to a transition, during which Kim Jong Il gradually consolidated his hold on power. Songs and newspaper editorials had identified a fear of contagion once European socialist states began to fall, but when the Eternal Leader died, it was as if ideology froze. Editorials about political matters declined sharply, just as discussions of social issues and economic matters increased (Soyoung Kwon 2004, 24–27). At the same time, song lyrics about the leaders and the party gave way to more ephemeral subjects. A series of Pochonbo albums produced during this period (volumes 23, 28, 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, and 42) indicate uncertainty. They offer folk songs, foreign songs, and reworked instrumental renditions of existing domestic songs. They drop all references to bumper harvests and the previously omnipresent paeans to the prosperity that Kim Il Sung had brought. Wangjaesan followed a similar path, with volumes 15, 16, 17, 21, and 22 featuring dance music, music for gymnastics, and settings of folk songs. Cultural production effectively trod water, waiting for a political resolution.

Rumors were rife. Some in the elder guard of war veterans, as well as members of Kim Il Sung’s family, were thought to oppose Kim Jong Il. Despite any firm evidence, a coup was thought imminent. Then, in the summer of 1995, newspaper editorials began to regularly promote the military, its exploits, and its role in maintaining the revolution. These signaled that the military had set a price for its support of Kim Jong Il, and that price was the *sŏngun* military-first policy, which would henceforth form “the rhetorical boundary within which state and party officials exercise whatever limited political freedom of movement they might at any specific time possess” (Denney, Green, and Cathcart 2017, 53; see also Kwon and Chung 2012). But, by giving the military such dominance, ideological stasis remained at the expense of economic development, since siphoning off precious resources to feed the massive military increased pressure on production. Still, to mix allusions, newspapers and broadcasters started to describe Kim as “the command post of the revolution” (Buzo 1999, 211–2), and Pochonbo’s volume 46 (1995), taking the title “*Uri ūi inmin kundae norae purŭja*/Let’s Sing of Our People’s Army,” as a consequence, links Kim to the military in a series of



laudatory songs, including one rendered in English as “Our Happiness in the Embrace of the Respected Leader.”

Support for Kim tangibly increased through Pochonbo’s volumes 47–50 and Wangjaesan’s 18–20. These emphasize the triumvirate of Kim Senior, Kim Junior, and Kim Jong Suk, the long-deceased wife to the father and mother to the son. Contemporaneously, mosaics, photographs, and images on stone appeared outside factories and schools, one to each of the three. Kim Jong Suk had died in 1949, and Kim Il Sung had remarried, but Kim Jong Suk’s elevation to mother of the nation effectively removed challenges from the second family.<sup>10</sup> Pochonbo volume 50, “*Paektu ūi malbalgŭp sori/* The Sound of a Horse’s Hooves on Paektu Mountain,” signaled that the transfer of power was complete: it offers a set of songs about Kim Jong Il’s official birthplace on Mount Paektu.<sup>11</sup> However, if we reflect back on this period, it can be argued that by shifting attention to the triumvirate of father, mother, and son, the Kim dynasty continued, but it did so over the needs of modernization and reconstruction. It made the march of suffering more desperate. One result was that party authority broke down in some enclaves, and local administrators tentatively began to challenge what seemed like central intransigence (Kwon and Chung 2012, 162–73). As posters proclaimed, “Let us live for tomorrow, not for today” and “Let us smile, even though the road ahead is bumpy,”<sup>12</sup> songs cast aside social and economic issues and returned to earlier struggles, restating how the revolution continued. Thus, Pochonbo 51 is titled “*Tangshini ŏpsŭmyŏn chogukto ŏpta/* No Motherland without You” and Pochonbo 53 “*Sŭngni ūi yŏlbyŏngshik/* Victorious Parade,” both recycling song titles from earlier years. In a similar vein, Wangjaesan 24 immortalizes Kim Il Sung: its first song is “*Yŏngsaeng ūi mosŭp/* He Is Immortal.” Table 9.1 summarizes Pochonbo’s releases through this transitional period.

So the son had power, but the father had to remain the hero. The father’s palace in Pyongyang was enlarged on the instructions of the son, and Pyongyang residents, according to my guide when I visited in 2000, “gave of their time freely” to plant showcase gardens. The palace became the father’s mausoleum, marked by songs without words on the album *Songs of Korea 34* (introduced in Chapter 6). The long-running *Chosŏn ūi norae/Songs of Korea* (with the label “KM” or “KMC”) series, incidentally, supplements Pochonbo and Wangjaesan releases, mostly using the choir and/or orchestra, with or without soloists, of the State Merited Chorus of the Korean People’s Army (Chosŏn inmin’gun konghun kukka hapch’angdan).



**Table 9.1** Pochonbo Electronic Ensemble recordings, 1994–1997*A: Ideology falters:*

Vol. 23 Foreign songs from China, Russia, Cuba, and more

28 Instrumentals, e.g., “We Shall be Loyal Forever,” “General Mobilization”

36 Folk songs, e.g., “Golden Mountain Ballad,” “*Miryang Arirang*”

38 Foreign songs from China, Russia, Japan, e.g., “Ali Baba,” “Alohe Oe”

39 Foreign songs, e.g., “The Maiden’s Prayer,” “Brother Louis”

40 Foreign songs, e.g., “Jingle Bells,” “Bonjour”

41 Instrumentals, e.g., “Hungarian Rhapsody,” “Thanks to Leader’s Care”

42 Instrumentals, e.g., “The Motherland Will Remember Forever,” “Girl on a Swing”

*B: The triumvirate: father, mother, and son:*46 *Let us Sing of our People’s Army*, including “My Dear is a Hero Now,” “Happiness in the Embrace of our Respected Leader”

47 including “Confetti of Best Wishes,” “Under the Benevolent Sunrays”

48 including “We Have Waited for You,” “We Can’t Live Otherwise”

49 including “If Our Mother Party Wishes,” “For the Coming Generations”

*C: Kim Jong Il takes the helm, accepting the “military first” policy:*50 *The Sound of a Horse’s Hooves on Paektu Mountain*, including “We Love,” “His Whole Life,” “Our General is the Greatest”51 *No Motherland Without You*; includes “No Motherland without You,” “Kimjongilia Blossoms in the Native Home,” “Let Us Go to the Mountains and the Seas,” “Youth is an Express Train,” “I Am Joyful,” “Tell the Motherland,” “Longing for the General,” “Peace Is Our Bayonet”

With the succession settled, songs entered a new period of stasis. Wangjaesan 25 suggests some schizophrenia remained, as it mixes songs about everyday people, artillery women, cavalry, heroic soldiers, and victory parades. The requirement to showcase ideology was relaxed, and those developing song repertoires may well have felt the need to diversify, since it was surely an unattractive challenge to promote songs about bumper harvests as people starved, or to sing about industrial superiority as factories lay idle. Indeed, such topics were conspicuously absent in 1997 and 1998, when several releases showcased “favorite” songs. *Songs of Korea* 56 (CD Korea KM-C-256, 1997) and Pochonbo 84 (PEE-C-1094, 1998) do, though, include eulogies for Kim Il Sung and songs supporting a strong military in, yet again, “No Motherland without You,” and also in “*Yŏngung ŭi nara arŭmdawŏra/* Beautiful Is the Hero Country” and “*Uri ŭi chŏngch’angoe p’yŏnghwaga itta/* Peace Is on Our Bayonet.” But these are joined by hopes for reunification,

matching the publicity given at the time to building a new arch on the road running south from Pyongyang to the border with South Korea, in “*T’ongira t’ongira/O, Reunification, Reunification.*” There are also lyrics about scenic places linked to the official Kim family history. *Songs of Korea* 56 includes “*Maebongsan ŭi norae/Song of Mount Maebong*” and “*Millimi sölleinda/ Forests Sway*,” recalling Kim as guerrilla leader, but also “*Chǒngilbonge an’gae hūrüne/Mists Rise over Jong Il Peak*,” immortalizing Kim Jong Il’s birth. And some songs are repeatedly reincarnated, for example on Pochonbo 101 (PEE-C-1111, 2000), where old songs meet the anodyne “*Ppōkkugi/Cuckoo*” and “*Chōnyō ŭi sunsugōn/Girl’s Handkerchief*.”

A renewal of activity began in 2002, as preparations were made for the “*Arirang*” festival. New words were given to the long-established folk song of the same name.<sup>13</sup> Earlier recordings, such as on Wangjaesan 21, feature old lyrics, but now Kim Il Sung becomes, capitalized as if his legal name is the Sun, the harbinger of life:

Arirang, the Sun’s Korea enjoys high prestige  
As it grows stronger.  
Arirang, the country of the Sun’s nation is good to live in  
As it flourishes. (*Korea Today*, September 2002, 2)

The festival began its initial run on February 16, Kim Jong Il’s birthday, with “*February Is Spring*,” setting lyrics by Ch’a Myōngsuk to music by Chin Kwōn and reminding people where power now resided:

The frost glitters in the forest of larch trees,  
But warm spring sunrays streak through the window.  
We greet spring in the garden of the native home,  
At the secret camp on Paektu Mountain in February! (*Korea*,  
February 2002, 6)

It proved to be a busy year. There were talks with the Japanese prime minister and with American diplomats. A North Korean team participated at the Asian Games held in October in the South Korean port city of Pusan. However, diplomacy faced new crises, not least when Kim Jong Il forgot “the art of the deal,” as he admitted to kidnapping people from Japan in the 1970s. But the slow drip of new songs suggested the regime was confident of

survival, and that the arduous march was now consigned, at least officially, to history. Sampling song lyrics from magazines illustrates this:

Nights of paradise beautifully illuminated!  
 Streets of the motherland bright with floral processions!  
 Our leader took up the first spade to the ruins  
 To build a new country and bring us a happy life. ("*Urinŭn pint'ŏesŏ shijak hayŏnne*/We Started from Scratch"; *Korea*, July 2002, 16)

The flower blooms on a rock with singular devotion,  
 Life is immortal under [our leaders'] loving care.  
 We must take the revolutionary road, come snow or rain,  
 Let us be true to our oath:  
 We look up to Hanbyŏl,<sup>14</sup> our guiding light. ("The Song of Comradeship"; *Korea Today*, August 2002, 8)

It is good if a girl has a nice figure,  
 But it is better if she is an able worker and good-natured with it;  
 I like a girl who makes life pleasant  
 By singing the songs of [our country's] creation. ("The Girl I Love"; *Korea Today*, August 2002, 8)

Our nation is one, and our blood is one,  
 Our land is also one; we are one nation that cannot exist divided into two.  
 Washing the painful wounds with tears for long years,  
 The joy of reunification now surges up,  
 We are one, our Sun's Korea is one. ("We Are One"; *Korea Today*, September 2002, 32)

### Footsteps of the general

Then, on December 17, 2011, Kim Jong Il died. At his state funeral on December 28, Kim Jong Un walked alongside the hearse. He was duly declared chairman of the Workers Party of Korea and became the world's youngest head of state. Learning from the past, his elevation was prepared for and marked by songs, particularly by a song that first appeared in early 2009, "*Palkŏrŭm*/Footsteps." This had words and music, like so many songs of the previous two decades, by Ri Chongo.

The succession question had become unexpectedly urgent three years earlier, when, in August 2008, Kim Jong Il disappeared from public view after suffering what commentators concluded were one or more strokes.<sup>15</sup> The family succession was not straightforward. His first son, Kim Chŏngnam (1971–2017), by his first mistress, the film actor Song Hyerim, had been assumed the designated heir, although some have noted he had views on modernizing the state that made his succession questionable. In 2001, though, Chŏngnam fell from grace after he was arrested at Narita Airport in Tokyo traveling on a fake passport. Chŏngnam was, infamously, murdered at Kuala Lumpur's airport in 2017. His second son, the “unmanly” Kim Chŏngchŏl (b. 1981), born to Kim Jong Il's consort Ko Yŏnghŭi, along with Kim Jong Il's brother-in-law and later-to-be-executed Chang Sŏngt'aek (1946–2013), had at times been considered potential successors, but the regime remained silent about its plans. Kim's former chef, a Japanese known under the pseudonym Fujimoto Kenji, was the first to describe Kim Jong Un, the youngest son (and second son with Ko), as his father's favorite in a 2003 memoir, but little was known about him. That was until March 8, 2009, when the BBC noted that Kim Jong Un was on the ballot for election to the Supreme People's Assembly.<sup>16</sup> It was soon reported that Pyongyang's officials were pledging loyalty to the young Kim,<sup>17</sup> and in August 2010, Japanese, British, and South Korean news agencies speculated as to whether the young Kim had accompanied his father on a trip to China.<sup>18</sup> On September 27, 2010, he was named a general, a day ahead of a party meeting—this is thought to have been the first time he was mentioned in state broadcasts by name<sup>19</sup>—and a day later he was named vice chair of the Central Military Commission.

That Kim Jong Un's elevation was prepared for and marked by songs illustrates how music was routinely linked with state affairs. Chapter 1 opened by discussing the satellite and torch superimposed on television news broadcasts marking the claimed launch of the state's first satellite, and, likewise, the first long-range missile fired during Kim Jong Un's reign, on April 13, 2012, was named Ŭnhasu (Galaxy),<sup>20</sup> a name shared with a pop-style orchestra, the Ŭnhasu kwanhyŏn aktan, that had just performed in Paris.<sup>21</sup> Although songs were still at times put on the creaking official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) websites in North Korea and Japan, they began to be uploaded online for global audiences at the end of 2007. By 2012 the Shenyang-based Uriminzokkiri had taken over, and it began an Internet blitz to disseminate songs. Commentators noted how no expense seemed too much for cultural promotion, and the United Nations was soon investigating an attempt to buy hundreds of specialist American tap dance shoes costing

\$200 a pair via an Italian agent for an as yet unknown cultural production, a purchase seen as violating international sanctions banning imports of luxury goods.<sup>22</sup>

“Footsteps” did not name the younger Kim, but it mentions the achievements of the *taejang* (general)<sup>23</sup> 18 months before his appointment to this rank. It did, though, indicate Kim Jong Il’s successor had been chosen, who walked in his predecessor’s footsteps, and who would—by naming February, the month of his father’s birth—bring no sharp policy shifts:

Tramp, tramp, tramp,  
The footsteps of our *taejang*,  
Spreading the spirit of February,  
Tramp, tramp, tramping upwards.

Footsteps, Footsteps,  
Stepping with vigorous energy,  
Strongly throughout the land,  
March with the convoys,  
Tramp, tramp, tramp.

It took some time for foreign watchers to catch on, and their caution was understandable, since many had been wrong-footed in 2002 when it had been assumed the “*Arirang*” festival would celebrate Kim Il Sung’s birthday in April, only to see it begin two months earlier. That festival had been marked by the song “February is Spring,” which miraculously brought the start of spring forward by two months as it shifted state hagiography from father to son.

In September 2009, Australia’s ABC network was one of the first to match “Footsteps” to Kim Jong Un. In a radio report from Tokyo by Mark Willacy, the song was said to be a “hot hit” in Pyongyang. It was being heavily plugged by state media. It was being hummed on farms and in factories, and the general’s footsteps were said to make mountains and rivers murmur with joy. The national soccer team had just qualified for the 2010 World Cup, and one of its members reported how the team “sang the song with deep emotion; it inspired us to win!” Through the autumn, “Footsteps” was used as the backing track for synchronized swimming and gymnastics displays (although such frivolity would subsequently be considered inappropriate for such a serious issue as the succession). It was used for parades. Massed military choirs sang it. Occasionally it was retitled “Let’s Follow in His Footsteps.”

“Footsteps” squared the circle. Because the new leader lacked any military experience, the song portrayed an unstoppable forward trajectory without needing to detail any past exploits. It was cast as a routine revolutionary song, and was usually sung by the State Merited Chorus, giving the message that the *sŏn’gun* military-first policy continued unabated.

Once Kim was formally unveiled as successor, “Footsteps” briefly gained a new title, “Song of General Kim Jong Un,” linking it to the state’s most celebrated military march, Kim Wŏn’gyun’s “Song of General Kim Il Sung.” This tellingly confirmed that the young successor was being groomed in the image of his grandfather, matching rumors of plastic surgery, weight gain, hairstyle, and dress, all of which were said by commentators to be aimed at strengthening the association between the two.<sup>24</sup> At a New Year’s concert in 2011, “Footsteps” was performed in front of a film juxtaposing a seated, aging, Kim Jong Il with the young, energetic Kim Jong Un. A further song was added, “Let’s Defend General Kim Jong Un with Our Lives,” reusing another melody by Kim Wŏn’gyun. Most strikingly, at a gala concert titled “We will be loyal down through the generations,” it formed the core to a medley transparently linking all three Kims—grandfather, father, and son. The medley moved from “Footsteps” to “*Nagaja Chosŏna/Let Korea Advance*,” performed first as a chorus then as a mass tap dance—here was the reason why Pyongyang had needed to import so many expensive American shoes. This mutated into two well-known paeans to Kim Jong Il, the second of which expanded to fuse grandfather, father, and son into one, “*Changgunnimŭn taeyangŭro yŏngsaenghashinda/The General Is Eternal Like the Sun*.” The message got through, and the performance ended as the audience and performers applauded the young Kim for several minutes, repeatedly chanting “Kim-Jong-Un-Kim-Jong-Il.”<sup>25</sup>

The leadership had learned from the difficult dynastic transfer to Kim Jong Il. Agreement with the massive military for Kim Jong Un’s takeover was given in advance, confirmed during the father’s last two years and in the first years of the son’s reign as revolutionary songs from earlier decades were resurrected and promoted. Such songs were now routinely performed by choirs, instrumentalists, and dancers in military attire. In February 2012, foreign media attention was lavished on a new group that was quickly nicknamed The Jonettes. This was a quintet lifted from the large Mansudae Art Troupe, and they sang while playing *ŏn’gŭm* plucked lutes for Kim Jong Il’s birthday—dressed in crisp, neat uniforms.<sup>26</sup> The junior Kim, in a subsequent purging of its senior ranks, arguably outmaneuvered the military, but it was through

songs that the military was made ordinary and everyday. Revolutionary songs were cast as “beautiful melodies”—despite video backdrops of battles and military games. On April 24, 2012, for instance, the deadpan announcer on Voice of Korea, ratcheting up an ongoing vitriolic attack against South Korea’s then president, Lee Myung Bak, told listeners to “please enjoy a new song,” the self-explanatory “*Chõnmani chõngpòkt’an twirira*/10,000,000 Will Become Bullets and Bombs.”<sup>27</sup> Two days later, on April 26, KCNA announced that songs such as “*Suryõngishiyõ myõngnyõngman naerishira*/Leader, Just Give Us Your Order”<sup>28</sup> and “*Paektusan chõngdaenün taedapharira*/Arms of Mount Paektu Will Answer”<sup>29</sup> were “ringing out” across the country,

vibrant with the will of all servicepersons and civilians to destroy the Lee Myung Bak swarm of rats at a breath<sup>30</sup> once the Dear Respected Kim Jong Un gives an order of action. Singing the songs, the servicepersons and the members of the Worker-Peasant Red Guards have taken full combat posture. Ro Un Dok, a member of the Red Guards [said] . . . “We never say empty words and our arms know no mercy. We will scathingly teach the Lee swarm of rats, which runs amuck like a puppy knowing no fear of the tiger,<sup>31</sup> what a real war is.”<sup>32</sup>

### Onward toward the “final victory”

Songs served multiple functions as the young Kim took control, and this seems to have been sensible given his youth and inexperience. So, when the KCNA promoted the song “*Nanün aranne*/I Know It Now,” the theme song from a film about the Korean War, “Wõlmi Island” on March 7 and 8, 2012, its video opened with Hawai’ian guitars and the sound of waves gently breaking on a rocky coastline. This morphed into the world of colonial-era popular songs, replete with the persistent foxtrot rhythm, as a solo female vocalist, to *karaoke*-style lo-fi reverb, took listeners back to 1949, and to the film that kick-started the domestic film industry, “Ah! My Hometown!” But, the commentary KCNA offered reminded readers of a very different contemporary world:

The song represents the spirit of devotedly defining the leader and the country displayed by the soldiers of the Korean People’s Army. In the Fatherland Liberation War, a company of the army defended Wõlmi Island for three days with only four cannons from an attack by more than 50,000 enemy troops. The song stresses that every thing [*sic.*] of the country liberated by President Kim Il Sung is more precious than one’s life.

KCNA posted the lyrics and videos for nine other songs between March 7 and March 15. These blurred stylistic boundaries. Four featured videos full of military imagery: “*Ch’ukpaerül tülja/At the Festival*,” “*Nanūnya sŏngun shidae ch’ongdaech’ōnyō/I am an Unmarried Youth of the Military First Revolution*,” “*T’aeyang ūi wisōngi tweja/Coming of the Satellite of the Sun*,” and “*Changgunnim kakkaiaen pyōngsaga sandane/The Great General Lives in Death Close By*.” Two portrayed nationalistic sentiments, featuring flags, monumental architecture, and the smiling faces of workers: “*Ch’uōk ūi norae/Song of Remembrance*” and “*Hanabakke ōmnūn chogugŭl wihayō/Without Exception Let’s Celebrate the Fatherland*.” Two featured countryside scenes: “*Pyōngsanūn p’isak sōllyeinūn sorirŭl tūnne/Listen to the Throbbing Voices of Insects at Death*” and “*Chōnsa ūi norae/Song of the Champion*.” One had children flying kites, “*Nae nara ūi p’urūn hanŭl/Blue Skies of My Country*.” *Sōngun*, the military-first doctrine, began to soften as the implications of Kim Jong Un’s vaunted new approach to combine military with economic strength—*pyōngjin*—were worked out. Certainly, the musical styles ranged from foxtrots to waltzes, from revolutionary songs to art songs, with accompaniments provided by lilting acoustic and lap guitars, brass bands, and accordions.

Kim Il Sung’s centenary fell on April 15. Kim Jong Un gave a laudatory speech about his grandfather, and his last words became the title for a new song: “*Ch’ōehu ūi sūngnirŭl hyanghayō apūro/Onward Toward the Final Victory*.” Composed by Yun Tugŭn and setting lyrics by Kim Munhyōk, this was a revolutionary song not dissimilar to those written during the 1940s, a solid, strident, binary 4/4 march across 16 bars. It pushed familiar buttons and linked grandfather to grandson—both as benevolent, unlike the emotionally cold and distant Kim Jong Il. The song, not unlike “Footsteps,” never mentioned Kim Jong Un by name, but followed through on propaganda that for some years had trumpeted 2012 as the year North Korea would emerge as a prosperous and powerful nation. Some commentators wrongly reported that the song downgraded *taeguk* (great nation) to *kukka* (nation),<sup>33</sup> and wondered whether the “final victory” implied a new attempt at reunification with the South, particularly because the song was incessantly broadcast. Its lyrics were printed in the state’s *Rodong Shinmun* newspaper on June 26:

Exploding the mental strength of the united hearts of our 10,000,000<sup>34</sup>  
citizens,  
Korea resounds with the marching drums of the powerful and prosperous  
nation.



Let's go, great nation of Mount Paektu, called by the Party,  
Onward, onward, to the final victory!

More militaristic songs now divided those associated with Kim Jong Il, recalling the past, from those praising Kim Jong Un, continuing messages from the past but adding novelty—such as tap dancing. But not all the songs were militaristic, and those that were not blurred genre boundaries. Discussion was underway about how popular culture could expand beyond, on the one hand, the sclerotic large performance troupes (*yesuldan*) that had been modeled on Soviet and Chinese practice and had long been active in each province and many cities,<sup>35</sup> and, on the other, the increasingly outdated Pochonbo and Wangjaesan bands. The discussions had begun some years before, along with broader efforts at revival that in economic and policy fields had included a disastrous currency reform and an effort to attract foreign capital by reinvigorating special economic zones left moribund after an initial attempt to establish them had stalled in the early 1990s.<sup>36</sup>

Ruediger Frank (2012) asks whether ideology was disrupted by Kim Jong Un's succession. As do, but using a longer lens benefiting from hindsight, Adam Cathcart, Robert Winstanley-Chesters, and Christopher Green (2017). Certainly, the succession came sooner than expected, since Pyongyang had anticipated Kim Jong Il would be present for his own official seventieth birthday in February 2012, and also for Kim Il Sung's centenary two months later. Internally, though, the message of songs was that there was no disruption. KCNA reported on May 7, 2012, for example, how Kim Jong Un meant more of the same: new dances comprising “kicking, clapping and shoulder moving and slow or quick waltzes” had been created that were being popularized among citizens, much as with the *chǒngsonyŏn* mass dance discussed in Chapter 7. Songs that had been recently choreographed for mass use included “My Wife” and “At a Go.” The same songs were everywhere at any given time, heard incessantly, reinforcing the everyday ordinary. Although the guitarist Jason Carter in 2007 reported that after a few days in Pyongyang, a visitor stops noticing this aural barrage,<sup>37</sup> songs have continued to provide the relentless dawn-to-dusk soundtrack for the theater that is Pyongyang. During my visit in 2000, I became irritated by the endless repetitions of the same songs and complained to my guides. One guide promised to bring a recording of something different to play in the car the next day, and duly produced, in place of Pochonbo and Wangjaesan, a tape of children singing. Their repertory, though, although claimed to be completely

different, was of very similar songs. The first songs children learn in kindergarten are about Kim Il Sung, as was apparent at a kindergarten where, in 2000, I was allowed to film young children singing, saluting, and marching to and from the makeshift stage (a photobook by Ko Yöngsuk published in 2014 in Pyongyang confirms this, as does a commentary by Hassig and Oh [2015, 109]). Indeed, many songbooks for children have been published, directed at elementary school children, teenagers, or university students, illustrating this same mix of songs—those that are the same as those known by all, and some written for children of a particular age. Series and volume titles include *Haksaeng sonyön norae chip* (e.g., 1980, 1983, 1984, 1985), *Chöngnyön norae chip* (e.g., 1972, 1973), *Ch'ungsöng üi norae* (1972), *Chosön tongyo sön'gokchip* (*Haebangjön p'yön*) (1993), and *Nanün Chosön sonyön tanwön* (2007). With the exception of the gulag, where propaganda through songs arguably has no purpose (as related in Kim Yong 2009 and Harden 2012), songs remain core tools for the regime.

Change, though, was in the air. Reading the tea leaves of cultural production is challenging, however. For instance, musicians are technically members of the military, but as state employees they have no choice as to where they work. So, since all bands and troupes are under state control, a single musician can perform with more than one ensemble. What does it mean if a musician appears in online videos with different groups? Again, ensembles drop from view only to reappear unexpectedly, with the same line-up or in entirely different formations, but what does this mean? We can trace a few singers to important families, or track their specific training, but can we assume all singers share similar backgrounds? Wangjaesan ceased to produce recordings at the turn of the millennium, but remained as backing musicians and as a dance group, their line-up shifting regularly. When did they disband? They disappeared in 2013 amid rumors, put out not least by the Seoul-based *Chosön Ilbo* (*Korean Daily News*), that key members had been executed by firing squad.

New groups debuted, but did these replace trusted, long-established groups? Certainly, all-female spin-offs of the long-established Mansudae Art Troupe were tried. The pops-style Samjiyön was one, set up in 2009, named after the area bordering Mount Paektu where guerrillas were based in the 1930s (and where their “rediscovered” camps are visited by the faithful). Usually a group of between 50 and 60, but also occasionally in a larger format, Samjiyön's line-up included pretty girls dressed in the elaborate frilly, formal dresses associated with early incarnations of the Japanese Takarazuka Revue.

Its larger format added men dressed in tuxedos. Samjiyŏn languished in the background for some years, then reemerged in 2018, when, as a large mixed troupe, it traveled to South Korea to celebrate the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics.

A second pops-style orchestra, Ŭnhasu, debuted in 2008, playing songs taken from Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *Phantom of the Opera* as well as a mix of Euro-American and Russian songs. At the military end of things, Ŭnhasu’s May Day concert in 2011 featured “We Will Follow Only You,” a song for the new leader. A concert a few days later that celebrated the eightieth anniversary of the founding of the North Korean army then had “Song of Love for the People,” sending out the message that although the ailing Kim Jong Il was rarely seen in public, he continued to work tirelessly for everybody. These were juxtaposed with songs celebrating workers that signaled the shift away from the military-first policy toward economic development: “The Honor of Raftsmen is Boundless,” “We Are a Worker-Couple,” “We Will Glorify the Honor of Coal Miners,” “Oh! My Favored Work Site,” “Push Back the Frontiers of the Latest Science and Technology,” and so on.

One musician who briefly sang with Ŭnhasu was Ri Sŏlju. She was with them for six months prior to February 2011, and she also sang with an offshoot that briefly took the name Moranbong (Draudt 2012, 2017, 46–47<sup>38</sup>) before becoming Kim Jong Un’s wife. By 2012, Ŭnhasu line-ups began to shrink, as the troupe moved away from center stage at important celebrations. Then, in 2013, the *Chosŏn Ilbo* reported its members had been required to watch the executions of Wangjaesan members. Later, the South Korean National Intelligence Service announced that four Ŭnhasu members had been shot as spies (the names of three have since become known).<sup>39</sup> Certainly, the troupe was missing from the September celebrations of National Day. Some reports suggest the orchestra was heard in a radio broadcast aired in October. Something very serious did happen, since no Ŭnhasu recordings have been available in Pyongyang since August 2013, and today it is as if the orchestra never existed.

By 2011 foreign commentators were reporting that, to cite one, “North Korean Celebrities Are Struggling Because of the Hallyu Wave.”<sup>40</sup> The circulation of illicit South Korean popular culture, and other foreign materials, was increasing, and it was reported that the regime had decided to counter it by revitalizing local production (Nye and Kim 2013, 37). Accounts by refugees, including the case of one jailed for three years for accidentally singing a song associated with the South recounted by the *Los Angeles*

*Times* journalist Barbara Demick (2010), and a 2017 report by Intermedia (Kretchen, Lee, and Tuohy 2017), indicate that cultural flows were happening. While the indications are that unauthorized pop consumption was increasing, there were also reports about the secretive “Group 109,” which patrolled Pyongyang’s streets searching for illicit DVDs and thumb drives.<sup>41</sup> Again, a campaign in 2018 cracked down on the increasing popularity of karaoke, where systems were feared to include foreign pop—including South Korean K-pop.

At the public level, no artistic subculture could exist, simply because the state controlled all production and performance. Behind the scenes, though, much was happening. In 2009 a bootleg DVD surfaced in Seoul, excerpts of which were broadcast by Yonhap News. It featured suggestive dance routines and a strip show; revealing costumes were the order of the day. The dancers were identified as Wangjaesan members, and one track, of a silver-costumed can-can dance to the 1979 track “Moskau,” attracted cultish interest.<sup>42</sup> Was this part of ongoing experiments to make music and dance more popular? Some commentators saw in the DVD proof of accounts that had circulated since the 1980s about the parties of Pyongyang’s elite, some orchestrated by Kim Jong Il, which were said to verge on debauchery.<sup>43</sup>

To understand what was happening, I must backtrack. The plethora of new bands and orchestras, and their promotion at the highest level—particularly when Kim Jong Il or, later, Kim Jong Un attended a concert<sup>44</sup>—did indicate a policy shift. Indeed, from the start of the new millennium, as those in the capital recovered from the arduous march, a number of North Korean musicians were sent abroad to study, to Vienna and Budapest as well as to Moscow and Beijing. Local publications on world music (Ch’oe Ch’unhŭi 2001) and dance (Ch’ŏng Min and Ri Mansun 2002) revealed efforts to study foreign music and dance, albeit with history adjusted to remain acceptable to state censors. North Korea also engaged with UNESCO’s programs for intangible cultural heritage, joining with South Korea to promote the listing of percussion bands (*nongak*) and the folk song “*Arirang*” as pan-Korean heritage (Mun S’ŏngny’ŏp and Cho Taeil 2011; Kim S’ŏngy’ŏng 2013). More musicians began to travel abroad to perform than in previous decades, and more Russian and European musicians and pedagogues were invited to Pyongyang. In the elite circles of Pyongyang, it had become fashionable to train as a singer or an instrumentalist. It seems that elite families actively encouraged their children to pursue careers in music, and well-oiled routes were in place that ran from Pyongyang’s elite elementary schools, through Pyongyang’s two elite

children’s palaces (one in the center and the other near Man’gyŏngdae; additional children’s palaces operated in each province), to the Kim Wŏngyun Music Conservatory (or, as it had been until renamed after the composer, the Pyongyang Music and Dance University). Kim Jong Un’s wife, Ri Sŏlju, reflected this new reality, while the all-girl Moranbong, from 2012, became its most significant product.<sup>45</sup>

### Rolands and Yamahas

When Moranbong debuted on June 6, 2012, commentators assumed a new era had dawned:

The beauty of its members, their fashion-creating hairstyles and make-up, and the jewelry worn with all kinds of outfits, symbolized that life could be good in present North Korea, especially among its middle and higher urban classes enjoying the benefits of the new economy. (Korhonen and Cathcart 2017, 15, citing Koo 2014; Tudor and Pearson 2015)

Behind the public face of North Korea, and beyond the stage on which the theater of Pyongyang is displayed, the *nouveau-riche* was thriving. They looked for ways to satisfy their consumption habits. Bored with established songs and song styles, the young generation of this affluent elite began to furtively consume South Korean pop. They frequented secret nightclubs. If this functioned as unauthorized popular culture, it was tolerated, though to varying degrees at different times. Moranbong, in flouting modernity, and after the experiments with Ŭnhasu and Samjiyŏn, was the official response, intended to sate the needs of the young. Synthesizers now proudly displayed Roland labels, and skeleton Yamaha violins and cellos provided melodic interest—interest, at least, for viewers who weren’t ogling the cute (*aegyo*)<sup>46</sup> girls playing them. The instrumentalists acted like stars, moving sinuously, demanding attention. They offered extended solos and group extemporizations, all tightly rehearsed, though at times suggesting improvisation. Complex lighting and laser shows made stages sparkle, and settings concentrated the audience gaze on the soloists standing in front of a line of supporting synthesizer players and drummers. To fill out the texture, an orchestra might be hidden off-stage, silhouetted behind a screen. Some continuity from the dances on the 2009 bootleg DVD was evident.

Keeping his father's and grandfather's legacies, Kim Jong Un is reported to have established Moranbong and supervised its first rehearsals (Cho Unchöl 2014). He attended its first concert, where he introduced Ri Sölju as his wife for the first time. From 2012 onward, with or without Ri, he greeted, sat with, or stood alongside Moranbong members whenever they were photographed (Zeglen 2017, 147). By doing so, Kim linked himself to the nouveau-riche, and to what was trendy and fashionable (Zeglen 2015). His association with Moranbong indicated both at home and abroad that he and Ri occupied the top position within a state where leadership had been vested in a network of elite families—families with wealth generated by permitted but illicit trading, who inherited their rank from parents and grandparents who fought as guerrillas alongside Kim Il Sung back in the 1930s (Frank 2012).

Commentators have often compared Moranbong with South Korean bubble-gum pop, to groups such as Girls' Generation, 4Minute, or GFriend (Draudt and Lee 2013; Kim Suk-Young 2014; Chön Hyönshik 2015; Koo 2016). In this, Moranbong's image-friendly performances link to the second (South) Korean Wave that began around 2008, since, as a search of YouTube or Youku quickly reveals, Moranbong is meant to be consumed online through sparkling videos.<sup>47</sup> But the lack of vocals and dance in early performances, and the obvious Western art music training of the string soloists evidenced through mannerisms, the holds of bows, head movements and finger vibrato techniques,<sup>48</sup> suggests a more apt comparison is to China's 12 Girls Band. The latter debuted in 2001 and spawned various imitators before Moranbong first took to the stage. China's equivalent mixed foreign and local music,<sup>49</sup> as did Moranbong, which in its debut combined Disney medleys with Bill Conti's "Fly with Me" and the 1967 Claude François song "*Comme d'habitude*" (better known in the 1969 Paul Anka arrangement for Frank Sinatra, "My Way").<sup>50</sup>

Moranbong's Korean tunes, though, were largely standard fare. They juxtaposed familiar songs that linked the three generations of leaders, demonstrating a continuity of the portable frame. Arguably, the songs had to remain standard to fit the continuing notion of seed theory, since lyrics were not given in instrumental versions. Some renditions can be described as meta versions of songs—new suits of clothes that upped the tempo, added beats and melodic decorations, and projected, much as revolutionary operas in the early 1970s did, filmed collages behind the band. The backdrops showed military operations, rocket launches, and on-the-spot guidance by the leaders. Korhonen and Cathcart note how Moranbong, its members

“visibly moved by national success . . . playing with emotion and strength,” celebrated the December 2012 launch of the Kwangmyŏngsŏng satellite, then visited a military base in April 2013, playing for admiring conscripts in the midst of a major security crisis with South Korea that began with the North’s third nuclear test (2017, 16, 18–19; see also Cathcart 2016). Again, David Zeglen (2017, 145) writes about their 2012 concert commemorating the 1953 armistice that ended the Korean conflict, and Kim Sumin (2013) explores their 2013 New Year’s appearance for celebrations of the Korean Workers’ Party. But continuities of message did not diminish their celebrity status. Indeed, for the year or so after their debut, celebrity both allowed and required the regime to bestow recognition and reward on Moranbong. But, by doing so, recognition was also given to Pyongyang’s nouveau-riche: all was well, so long as those who wanted greater freedom continued to extol the virtues of the regime and maintain its ideology (Tai Wei Lim 2017, 602–603).

And then Moranbong disappeared. First, the lead violinist, “Captain” Sŏnu Hyanghŭi, vanished in October 2013, only to reappear briefly in March 2014. She vanished again in May. Then the whole band disappeared in July 2015. Guy Debord would have it that the spectacle of celebrity needs to be kept in line through state violence (2010, 64), and violence has become an ordinary and everyday control mechanism in Pyongyang, played out to enforce conformity through a discursive but at times shifting rhetoric (after Coronil and Skurski 2006, 3–6).<sup>51</sup> In socialist states, policing music has “always implied a body count” (Taruskin 2010, xii). Safety can never be assumed, today any more than with the purges that awaited artists and writers in the 1950s. Although there may be other theories about what happened, ranging from the mundane to the extraordinary, it is certainly the case that in his early years in power, Kim Jong Un made sure his authority was understood, as he engineered the removal of senior military officers, and when he signed off on the sudden, and public, fall from grace and execution of his uncle, Chang Sŏngt’aek. Still, when Moranbong disappeared, rumors circulated. Ri Sŏlju was said to be jealous of the Moranbong director and former Pochonbo singer, Hyŏn Songwŏl, with whom Kim Jong Un was once supposedly romantically involved. Sŏnu was said to be too close to Kim’s soon-to-be-executed uncle. Band members were said to be implicated in the scandal of unacceptably risqué dance routines. Members were reported to have been shot or exiled. Commentators asked whether the emergence of a more conservative band at a performance in Moscow in August 2015, Chŏngbong, was



intended to replace Moranbong. But Chŏngbong wasn't completely new: its seven members had formerly been part of Wangjaesan.

Then, in September 2015, Moranbong reappeared. Sönu belatedly returned in December. Lim cites a report in the *New York Times* that identifies Ri Sölju as the band's patron (2017, 605) and argues that Kim Jong Un now vouched for the band while they were, essentially, his clients. But the group had become somewhat chastened. Korhonen and Cathcart (2017) and Cathcart and Korhonen (2017) note that their outfits were less sexy and they used less make-up than before, and that their musical arrangements were simplified and more mundane. Jewelry disappeared. Singers were added to the line-up, placing lyrics back in the foreground. Their singers, it has been argued, retained the folk-song-derived *juche* voice (Yi Kyöngbun 2015). What actually happened remains a mystery, but Moranbong must have challenged the conservative layers of censors who continued to guarantee orthodoxy, and the damping down could simply have been a matter of appeasing bureaucrats or one of many censors. Again, when Moranbong reappeared, they embarked on a high-profile tour of China, only to withdraw before giving a single concert after the Chinese government criticized North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons. By silently returning home, they proved their loyalty to the state, the party, and Kim Jong Un.

As Moranbong reintroduced song lyrics, North Korean cultural production took a step backward. Revitalization met conservatism. Songs once again reinforced the class state. Hence, in 2013, after the execution of Chang Söngt'aek, state media captured the reaction of Chöng Pongsu, manager of the prized vinalon factory in the eastern coastal city of Hamhüŋg, celebrated for its facilities and export potential of this man-made material and associated closely with Chang.<sup>52</sup> The manager gestured to the party newspaper, the *Rodong Shinmun*:

The song "*Urinün tangshinbakke moründa/We Know Only You*" was carried in the Party newspaper. This song represents our feelings. All our staff members chorused the song. As the song reads, only respected Kim Jong Un is in our hearts. With this faith, we are not afraid of anything and there is no fortress we cannot scale. Those with faltering faith can go. We, with the faith, we are singing the song. (cited in Cathcart and Korhonen 2017)

Coming full circle, then, songs had returned to everyday sameness. They once more rehearsed ideology, announced state policy, and memorialized



history. Songs, exceptional and ordinary, still formed the soundscape of Pyongyang and marked the rituals and the theater of daily life.

## Epilogue

This account ends in 2018. In late January of that year, Hyŏn Songwŏl, who had come to prominence as a singer with Pochonbo, had been appointed a merit artist, had directed Moranbong but was erroneously rumored to have been shot in 2013, and returned to public life in 2017, when she was elected to the Party’s Central Committee, traveled to South Korea as part of a delegation mapping out North Korea’s unexpected decision to participate in the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics. She caused a media frenzy,<sup>53</sup> profiled by the press as the closest North Korea had to a pop star. On February 7, a boat sailed south, docking in Kangnŭng on South Korea’s eastern coast, carrying Samjiyŏn, now a mixed 137-member ensemble. On the next day in Kangnŭng, and on February 11 in Seoul, Samjiyŏn gave two concerts, “serenading hundreds of South Koreans with familiar tunes while dozens of protestors blasted their own music outside to the beat of drums.”<sup>54</sup> There were dancers, singers, and instrumentalists. The women wore salmon pink dresses and the men magenta tuxedos. They began with the Pochonbo song “We Are Glad,” made their way through a medley from *Phantom of the Opera* and the “Derry Air”-based “You Raise Me Up.”<sup>55</sup> They kept away from ideological songs about the northern leadership and its military, offering medleys of both North and South Korean songs. On February 10, for the Games’ opening ceremony, two teams of athletes, from North Korea and South Korea, marched into the stadium to “*Arirang*,” replacing Kim Wŏn’gyun’s “Patriotic Song” and the equivalent southern anthem that has music by the Pyongyang-born Eak-tai Ahn (1905–1965).

Was this the result of diplomatic negotiations, or did it presage further glimpses of how Kim Jong Un’s new *pyŏngjin* policy, his intention to combine military and economic strength, was distancing him from his father’s legacy? In musical terms, the performances remained largely caught in a time before Kim Jong Un’s rise, but Samjiyŏn ended their concerts, in Seoul with the guest K-pop idol Seohyun, with “We Are One,” a song that looks to the reunification of the two Korean states, and one associated with the 1990 unification concerts, where, as Chapter 8 explored, the composers Isang Yun and Byungki Hwang led northern and southern delegations. Seohyun is a

member of the long-established K-pop group Girls' Generation,<sup>56</sup> and on April 1 she was part of a South Korean delegation that traveled to Pyongyang to perform in front of Kim Jong Un, Ri Sölju, and an audience of 2,000 at the East Pyongyang Grand Theater. She sang a second North Korean song, "*Purŭn pödŭnamu*/Green Willow."<sup>57</sup> The delegation included the 1990s singers Cho Yong-pil and Lee Sun-hee, the jazz pianist Yoon Do-hyun, and the contemporary girl-group Red Velvet (who had debuted in August 2014). Two days later, the delegation performed alongside northern artists. North Korean television broadcast much of the concerts, but tellingly omitted Red Velvet's overtly sexualized take on K-pop.<sup>58</sup> The April 1 concert was titled "*Pomi onda*/Spring Is Coming," moving the start of spring to later than Kim Jong Un's father's birthday, where the "*Arirang*" mass performance spectacle had it, toward his grandfather's birthday, when the Spring Arts Festival was still held.

This was the first time Kim Jong Un had attended a concert by South Korean artists. Did this presage, as commentators contemplated, the beginnings of détente? Well, 2018 unfolded in unexpected ways, and commentators had a hard time interpreting what had changed as Kim softened his image, as he met once with Donald Trump in Singapore and three times with South Korea's president, Moon Jae-in, and as he mastered the sign K-pop artists use to show love for their fans: tips of the thumb and index finger crossed together to form the shape of a heart. If you are reading this, you will know more than I do now, and, hopefully, still more pieces of the jigsaw, the puzzle and enigma of North Korean music and dance, will have been slotted into place.

# Notes

## Introduction

1. As discussed in Wilson 1998.
2. Commentators consider Kim Jong Il was born in 1941, but the 1942 birthdate is given in official accounts, most likely to align more auspiciously with his father's 1912 birthdate.
3. *Chosŏn ūmak* was published by a committee within the Korean Composers' Union (the Chosŏn chakkokka tongmaeng chungang wiwŏnhoe kip'anji) until the last issue of 1960, and thereafter by the Korean Musicians' Union (Chosŏn ūmakka tongmaeng chungang wiwŏnhoe), both entities coming under the umbrella of the Federation of Korean Literature and Art Unions (Chosŏn munhak yesul chŏngdongmaeng)—the publisher of *Chosŏn yesul*.

## Chapter 1

1. At least, this is the case in December 2018, at the time of writing.
2. Or 1984, or perhaps 1982 (which would neatly fit with Kim Il Sung's birth in 1912 and Kim Jong Il's official birth in 1942).
3. Citations here are from the 1992 English version.
4. See Chapters 4–6.
5. Correctives to this telling are, of course, many, and include Armstrong 2003b; Suzy Kim 2013; Jae-Jung Suh 2013, 8–12; and Lankov 2015, 3–11.
6. For which, see Chapter 5.
7. This is a generic title for lullabies.
8. Ham Tŏgil (1987) provides a foundational account of revolutionary songs. One attempt to backdate songs even further, to the *ūibyŏng* “righteous armies” at the beginning of the twentieth century, is in the journal *Chosŏn ūmak* (1962/7).
9. The two songs were already positioned first and second in a 1954 collection, *Chosŏn inmin kayo koksŏnjip* (Korean People's Song Collection) and in a 1957 English-language collection, *Selected Korean Songs*. One exception to this ranking is in a 1958 collection, *Kayo 101 kokchip—Chosŏn inmin'gun ch'anggŏn 10-chun'yŏn kinyŏm*, where, as the tenth anniversary of the state's founding was celebrated, “Song of General Kim Il Sung” dropped to fifth place.
10. For a translated discussion of the latter, by Lebedinsky, see Frolova-Walker and Walker 2012, 277–82. Soviet songs were promoted in North Korea and were printed in the Korean-Soviet cultural journal, *Chosŏn shinsŏn*, until the early 1950s.

11. As a teacher leading young pioneer students up Myohyang Mountain remarks in the Polish documentary directed by Andrzej Fidyk, *Defilada/The Parade* (1989). At <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8hIJnqqO3k>.
12. Lankov 2003, 14, 23–24. Some evidence suggests that the Soviets considered assassinating Kim so that Cho could become leader (for example, *Summary of World Broadcasts* FE/1502 A1/6 3/10/92), but they later had Cho arrested, shot, and buried in an unmarked grave.
13. Lankov 1999, 45. The four factions have been widely discussed. See, for example, Scalapino and Lee 1972; Dae-Sook Suh 1988; Lankov 2003; Armstrong 2003b, 2013; Szalontai 2005; and, in respect to literature and art, Myers 1994 and Gabroussenko 2010, 134–66.
14. Chang Yŏngch'ŏl (2001, 294) states that Kim Il Sung asked Kim Wŏn'gyun to compose it. This, though, is as northern hagiography would demand.
15. Part of an honor system inherited from the Soviet Union but adding North Korean distinction (including the premier award, the Kim Il Sung Prize), people's artists occupy eight ranks.
16. Since 2015 named the Kim Wŏn'gyun University of Music (Kim Wŏn'gyun myŏngch'ing ūmak chonghap taehak), the conservatory was in 2003 split off from the Pyongyang Music and Dance University (P'yŏngyang ūmak muyong chong taehak), which in turn had since 1972 fused formerly separate music and dance institutions. The former institutions date back, according to current documentation, to 1949, although the Pyongyang Music School (P'yŏngyang ūmak hakkyo) was first set up in 1946.
17. Given myriad adjustments and changes during the course of recent history, a detailed discussion of unions/federations, both relating to North and South Korea and including local/subsidiary bodies, is beyond the scope of this study.
18. Meredith Shaw explores how the leadership cults for both Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il are set out in a series of so-called “immortal” publications. See “Inside North Korea’s literary fiction factory,” at <http://thewire.in/218228/inside-north-koreas-literary-fiction-factory/>.
19. Ri Wŏngŏn explores the construction of lyrics in this and other comparable songs (1990, 83–93).
20. *Chosŏn ūi onŭl (Korea Today)*, April 4, 2016, <http://www.dprktoday.com/index.php?type=2&no=11692>.
21. See Kwŏn 1991, 59; Armstrong 2003a, 82; and Chapter 5.
22. A rejection noted by Martin (2004, 172).
23. Eaktay Ahn [An Ikt'ae] (1906–1965), the composer of what became the South Korean national anthem, who was active in Europe during the 1930s, can serve as an example. See Chŏn Chŏngim 1998; Choong-Sik Ahn 2005, 94–98; and, *passim*, Hoffman 2015.
24. As explored in relation to Theodor Adorno and the Frankfurt School by, for example, Paddison (1998), DeNora (2003), and Spitzer (2006), but note the controversial holistic corrective to such analyses offered by Hodgkinson (2016).

25. Perris argues that a true Marxist considers all music serves one class: high art serves the elite, while avant-garde and experimental music is not just for the privileged few but is also immoral (1985, 67–73).
26. Note, too, that although censorship and control function as mechanisms to police music in both fascist and socialist states, the focus tends to be on lyrics, or on aspects of performance other than music as sound. Copyright law, from the Statute of Anne forward, has tended to be based around written texts.
27. Ro Ikhwa (1989) assembles 70 songs by Ri.
28. See later for an exploration of *ri/-li* as a measure of distance.
29. Notated alongside other songs celebrating the massive but now downplayed Chinese contribution to the war in the collection *Cho-Chung ch'insŏn ŭi norae* (Korean-Chinese Friendship Songs) (Pyongyang: Chosŏn ūmak ch'ulp'ansa, 1958).
30. Chang Yŏngchŏl (1998, 305–27) gives Ri's biography, suitably cast in a socialist light, and a selected list of his songs.
31. Korean *shin minyo* are also distinct from the more recent Chinese *xin minyao* (using the same Chinese lexigraphs) or *chengshi minyao* (the latter indicating “city folk songs”) (Pease 2001, 46, citing Huang et al 1996). *Shin minyo* singers were, in contrast to their equivalents in China, a mixed bag, rather than being confined to those who specialized in popular folk songs. See later for a discussion of the term *minyo*.
32. Similar discussions have taken place in China, where in 1927 Li Jinhui is said to have turned to writing popular songs regarded in Communist times as “yellow music” (Liang Maochun 1988, 32–34; Jones 1992, 11).
33. Some texts give 1900–1940. “Ranp'a” is the North Korean spelling; “Nanp'a” the South Korean.
34. Further research is needed, but for the moment I note that the majority of the twentieth-century composers and singers listed in the second volume of a compendium of historical musicians compiled by Mun Sŏngnyŏp (2001) were specialists in *taejung kayo*, *shin minyo*, and *yesul kayo*.
35. The border between the two emerging states in the period leading up to the Korean War was porous, allowing many to cross, among them left-leaning writers and artists moving northward and right-leaning people, including landowners, collaborators with the Japanese colonial police, and Christians, southward. Armstrong (2003a) explores how the period was reflected in cultural policy, while useful accounts of the period include those of Cumings (1997, 185–237) and Robinson (2007, 100–20).
36. See Chapter 4.
37. See Chapter 8.
38. Szalontai considers there was no substantial Muscovite faction in Pyongyang (2005, 18). Although Soviet-leaning Koreans were regarded by Stalin as faithful allies, he forcefully relocated many Koreans from the Soviet Far East to Central Asia in the late 1930s, and when Kim fled northward from Manchuria his guerrillas were made subordinate to Red Army forces (Cumings 1990, 333). Chŏng Sangjin's memoir, published in Korean in Seoul in 2005, explores Soviet influence on artistic production in North Korea.

39. Myers cites Norman Jacobs's 1985 definition of patrimonialism: "the right to authority is determined primarily by moral-intellectual considerations, monopolized by a self-asserting elite, and validated by the dissemination of moral service . . . by that elite." See also Gabroussenko (2010, 167ff), and, for a discussion of Confucian patrimonialism within the Korean context, Hong (2018, 131–83).
40. South Korean musicologists tend to see ideology in the North in absolute terms and gloss over factionalism. In contrast, South Korean literature scholars (Yi Chŏlju 1966; Yi Kibong 1986; Kim Chaeyong 1994; Pak T'aesang 1999) identify double standards in factional criticism, since in specific works they find little difference between winners and losers.
41. Printed in the first edition of *Munhwa chŏnsŏn* (November 15, 1945), the handwritten score is reproduced by No Tongŭn (1989, 194). An's retrospectively rosy biography is provided by Chang Yŏngchŏl (2001, 249–63).
42. To date, the major biography of Kim Sunnam is by No Tongŭn (1992), although this focuses on Kim's life up to 1953, offering only a brief sketch of his later life.
43. Kraus (1989, 40–69) relates Xian's story, from low-class origins through political agitation and expulsion from the Shanghai Conservatory, to his ambiguous legacy.
44. Although of Chinese descent, Chŏng was born in Kwangju, in Korea's southwest. Korean sources give his year of birth as 1914 while Chinese sources typically state 1918. Reports indicate that in 1950 Zhou Enlai wrote to Kim Il Sung requesting that Chŏng return to China; Pease (2011) suggests that by this time he was distrusted by Kim's regime, since he had been demoted, so it can be argued that he escaped before Kim began to purge the factions during the Korean War. He died in Beijing. His works quickly disappeared from view in Pyongyang, but a 1991 film, "*Ŭmakka Chŏng Ryulsŏng/Musician Chŏng Ryulsŏng*" reinstated his legacy, albeit in a revisionist way: it depicts how he was guided by Kim Il Sung to compose popular songs for the people. The film was scripted by O Hyeyŏng and starred Ri Wŏnbok as Chŏng; the 1992 film yearbook, *Chosŏn yŏnghwa ryŏn'gam*, gives the full script and still photographs (1992, 115–37, 217) while the 1992 music yearbook, *Chosŏn ŭmak ryŏn'gam*, includes the title song, "*I shimjang pach'iri/I Give My Heart*," a 6/8 lilting lullaby (1992, 158).
45. According to Kim Ch'aewŏn (in *Chosŏn ŭmak* 1961/1), the work was begun in 1948, finished in 1949, and the first two sections performed at the National Theater in 1950 by the Central Symphony Orchestra and the theater's singers. It was subsequently arranged for an orchestra mixing Korean stringed and wind instruments with Western brass. For a performance by Japanese Koreans, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Lzrpo3tJR8>.
46. The most celebrated women divers in Korea are those from the southern island of Cheju, whose songs were recorded by the BBC sound engineer John Levy in 1964 (archived in Edinburgh, and issued on CD by the National Gugak Center in Seoul).
47. Two volumes of Kim's songs were published, in 1958 and 1966. The second, published by the Federation of Korean Literature and Art Unions (*Chosŏn munhak yesul chŏngdongmaeng ch'ulp'ansa*), celebrates his life, listing songs (1966, 191–95) and offering a comprehensive biography.

48. My point is that the battle struggles to equate the huge offensives and massive loss of life endured in major wars. Another example of this apparent discrepancy is the small USS *Pueblo* spy ship, captured off the eastern coast in 1968 but today the prize exhibit of a museum celebrating the “victory,” primarily during the Korean War, of the North’s forces against American foes.
49. For a historical discussion of Mount Paektu that explores the ideology it was associated with prior to those of contemporary North Korea, see Pratt 2019.
50. The legend was revived in the early twentieth century as part of the nationalist assertion of Korean identity. In the early 1990s, northern archaeologists claimed to have discovered Tan’gun’s grave, which, in keeping with the state’s claim to legitimacy, was conveniently located on the slopes of Mount Taebak near Pyongyang. A mausoleum was built, which has been open to visitors since 1994.
51. Richardson (2017, 116–19) provides a critical discussion of Kim Jong Il’s birth and of the hagiography surrounding the Kim family.
52. Initially set up in 1947 as a band and performing “Song of General Kim Il Sung” that same year, through a merger of related performance troupes in 1971 this became a composite organization replete with orchestra, choir, and various additional performers.
53. On some scores and for some recordings, “music-and-dance” (*ūmakkwa muyong*) is spelled out, but this is not always the case.
54. The publication date given on materials I have consulted is 1982, but the Swedish diplomat Erik Cornell observed an earlier, possibly the first performance during his appointment to Pyongyang between 1975 and 1977.
55. English translation as on the published cassette tape. A better translation would be “Land of Orchards Unfurled by the Leader.”
56. A Korean *ri* was shorter than the Chinese equivalent, which typically measured about 500 meters; translating a *ri* as a mile, as is common, is convenient though highly inaccurate.
57. Moody (2013, 220), citing de Crespigny (2007, 189). Howard and Kasmambetov (2011) reflect on horses in the Central Asian *Manas* epic.
58. Myers writes that the backdating was a deliberate ploy by northern historians to make Ch’ŏllima look less like the Chinese movement (2010, 41), but Armstrong (2013, 103, 2014, 46) concludes that the two were coterminous. Armstrong notes that while the Great Leap Forward was short-lived and led to millions dying, the results of Ch’ŏllima were more ambiguous, since it established a lasting system of volunteer-based labor waves and remained enshrined in the constitution until 1992. Songs during the last few years have revisited the campaign, although Ch’ŏllima has been upgraded to Mallima—the 10,000-*ri* horse. Cheehyung Kim states the earliest written reference to Ch’ŏllima is from 1958—the year of Kim and Cho’s song—and the work team movement did not begin until 1959 (2018, 109).
59. For the Soviet movement, see Siegelbaum 1990. See also “Alexei Stakhanov: The USSR’s superstar miner,” at <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35161610>.
60. In Kim Il Sung *Selected Works* 1 (1971, 582–606).

61. *Minyo* is a loan word imported from Japan (J. *minyō*), where the term had been introduced most likely by the novelist Mori Ogai (1862–1922) as a translation from the German *Volkslied* (Hughes 2008). In 1913 the Japanese governor-general in Korea ordered research on *minyo/minyō* be undertaken, and the earliest published use of the Korean term is in the title to a 1916 article by Ko Wimin published in the journal *Ch'unch'u* (*Spring and Autumn*).
62. Taruskin (1997) mentions pre-Soviet Russian folk song anthologies by Arakchiyev, Balakirev, Chulkov, Istokin and Dyutsh, Kargareteli, Kashin, and others, as well as discussions about typical folk song modes, cadences, and meters; folk song as a source for composers is a frequent topic for Frolova-Walker (2007). In China, Xian Xinghai was one of those who prepared a folk song anthology while, as composers adapted folk songs, ideologues provided new texts (Mittler 1997, 30–31, 121, 325).
63. At least eight short volumes were completed by 1955. Mimeographed copies were published in July 1956 by the state newspaper, the *Rodong shinmun* (*Worker's Daily*).
64. In South Korea, many small or regionally focused collections have been published, although later, along with superb compendiums of lyrics (by, for example, Im Tonggwŏn [1961–1992] and Yesul yŏngushil [1979–1990]). The first comprehensive transcription project for folk-song music, however, was launched by the Academy of Korean Studies and never completed (e.g., Chŏe Chongmin 1984, 1988), only to be superseded by a massive Munhwa Broadcasting Company project that resulted in eight books and 103 CDs (Chŏe Sangil, ed., 1989–1998).
65. Ri was talking before the mid-1990s saw a widespread regression back to manual agricultural labor.
66. My assumption is based on surviving *pansori* texts collated by the local government officer (*ajŏn*) Shin Chaehyo prior to his death in 1884, which refer to one folk song as “*Nongbuga*.”
67. In Sino-Korean, and seen from a Neo-Confucian perspective, *tŏsok* hints at vulgarity.
68. For a more recent discussion, focusing on how both types of folk songs have been preserved in South Korea, see Maliangkay 2017.
69. Although the English version of this is dated 1991, the most commonly encountered Korean original, *Ŭmak yesullon*, bears a 1992 publication date. The English version I cite throughout this volume is in Kim Jong Il's *Selected Works* 11 (2006, 368–557).
70. Ethnomusicologists will need little reminder of the issues of (un)reliability in transcription; consider England et al. 1964 and List 1974.
71. As illustration, the classic critique of the arguments and practices pertaining to British folk song collections is by the left-leaning Harker (1985). See also Porter 1991.
72. Using the most representative song, “*Yukchabaegi*,” if *c* is the central tone, the *kkŏngnŭn mok* typically falls from  $\text{e}^{\flat}$  to *d* and the *tŏnŭn mok* is a low *g*.
73. In “*Sushimga*/Song of Sorrow,” if *c* is the vibrated central tone, the mediant is a flat  $\text{e}^{\flat}$  (at times, closer to *d*) and the dominant is low *g*.
74. The Namdo vocal style was also condemned by Kim Il Sung, because of its associations with *pansori* epic storytelling through song (see Chapter 5).



75. For example, Han 1973 and Hahn 1978. I have elsewhere summarized South Korean modal analyses (Howard 1990, 147–50; Howard, Lee, and Casswell 2008, 56–59).
76. An unpublished paper by Chong Bong Sop, delivered to the Sixth Asian Music Symposium in Pyongyang in October 1983, cites the popular folk songs “*P’ungnyŏn’ga*/Song of Bumper Harvest” and “*Ŭnshil t’aryŏng*/Ballad of Silver Thread” as examples to show these “national melodic phrases.”
77. In addition, the impact of vocalization on composition is considered from a Chinese Korean perspective by Cho Inbok (2015).
78. “On the direction which musical creation should take,” talk to creators, October 25, 1968, and *On the Art of Music* (2006 [1991], 390).
79. Still, a few singers of *Sŏdo sori*, such as Kim Chinmyŏng (1914–1997), were, to an extent, celebrated. After his death, Kim’s biography is recounted by Chang Yŏngchŏl (1998, 328–41).
80. As was already anticipated in a collection published in 1958 alongside the basic transcription volumes: *Chosŏn minyo kokchip (yŏnju charyo)*, published by Chosŏn ūmak ch’ulp’ansa.
81. Again, published by Chosŏn ūmak ch’ulp’ansa.
82. Published by the Kungnip munhak yesul sahoe chulp’ansa.
83. Kang quotes a 1995 text, *Chosŏn ūi minsok chŏnt’ong: minsok ūmak kwa muyong* (6, 40), for the creation process of new, contemporary folk songs (2001, 59).
84. There is logic in Chŏe’s approach, since *minyo* was a term typically encountered by Koreans through recordings of popular folk songs.
85. The story, and the song, is discussed in Howard 2006b, 102–12.
86. The inclusion of *shin minyo* in the folk song category is clear in discussions by Chang Yŏngchŏl (1998, 230–78, and, in respect to the *shin minyo* singer Wang Subok, 342–52) and Hwang Ryŏngguk (2001).
87. A thoroughly-researched history of the dance is in Seo 2010.
88. Lyrics cited here are from recordings I made in Pyongyang in 1992 and 2000 and from two undated cassette tapes, *Chosŏn minyo kokchip* volumes 1 (*ka*–50588) and 3 (*ka*–009511).
89. Compare with the following older lyrics, which are still sung in South Korea:
 

Guarding the country, the famous Manjang Peak appears as a golden lotus carved by the blue heavens.  
 Its auspicious color permeates the palace; its magical power fosters many talented people,  
 Strengthening the country for generations to come, and maintaining the peace.  
 The waters of the Han River flow lazily as the sun setting behind Mount Inwang brings back old memories (from Kim Haesuk ed. 2017, 41, adjusted).
90. The Mansudae company was founded in 1959, and is the largest artistic company in North Korea, divided when I visited in 1992 into ten teams specializing in oil painting, frescoes, ceramics, sculpture, and so on. Responsible for almost all large-scale monuments, I was told that around 2,000 people worked for the company—a number confirmed by several sources.

91. The first karaoke venue opened in North Korea in 1992 linked to Pyongyang's Koryo Hotel. It was intended to earn foreign currency from Japanese and Chinese visitors, particularly businessmen, and at various times it has tried to attract Russian as well as Western visitors. Accounts from recent years include two by Kim Chunho on the RFA website ([https://www.rfa.org/korean/in\\_focus/karaoke-10042012100123.html](https://www.rfa.org/korean/in_focus/karaoke-10042012100123.html) and [https://www.rfa.org/korean/in\\_focus/karaoke-03262018101947.html](https://www.rfa.org/korean/in_focus/karaoke-03262018101947.html)).

## Chapter 2

1. "People's instruments" at times substitutes for "national instruments," but since the term *minjok chuui* is normally rendered as "nationalism," I use "national" here.
2. The Congress also announced an ambitious seven-year economic plan, which has, not surprisingly, received greater critical attention than any cultural policy, not least because, following the massively successful developments of the preceding four years under the Ch'ollima campaign, it was destined to stall.
3. The first to perform a *kayagŭm* in post-war Yanbian was most likely An Kungmin, a musician trained to play Western instruments, and it appears he first used a 13-stringed Japanese *koto* as a substitute, then asked a piano maker in Harbin to create an adapted *kayagŭm*, again with 13 strings (rather than the traditional 12). The number of strings used later increased to 15 before it settled on 21. At the conference, Kim first stated An Kiok's involvement began in 1953, but an audience member argued that 1952 was the correct year. Indeed, 1952 is confirmed by Kim Namho (1995, 129).
4. This succeeded the Korean National Instrument Reconstruction Enterprise (Chosŏn minjok akki kaejo saŏp), formed, according to *Chosŏn ūmak* (1955/2, 39–42), in June 1953. It was later rolled into the National Music Study Institute.
5. The debates are reflected in several reports and publications, such as Chosŏn chakkokka tongmaeng chungang wiwŏnhoe (1959) and Kogohak mit minsogak yŏnguso (1959).
6. In fact, Kim Ch'angman had been contributing to the discussions about musical development since 1959, since in January 1959 the journal *Chosŏn ūmak* carried an interview with him, and in June 1959 he penned an editorial about the need to raise the quality of song creation.
7. The overarching Federation was re-established in March 1961, following a speech the previous November in which Kim Il Sung critiqued the lack of party control over literature and art ("Ch'ollima shidae-e sangŭnghan munhwa yesurŭl ch'angjohaja: chakka, yesurindŭlgwa ūi tamhwa," later published in *Uri hyŏngmyŏngsesŏ ūi munhak yesul ūi immu* 1965, 30–31, as cited in Myers 1994, 126). By the turn of the new millennium, South Korean government sources report that the Federation oversaw subsidiary unions for writers, composers, artists, actors, filmmakers, dancers, and photographers. But, and key to understanding censorship, the Federation remained subservient to the party's propaganda bureau as well as to the Central Committee itself (a further discussion will be given in Chapter 5). Ch'oe will be discussed further in Chapter 7.
8. A brief discussion is given by Frolova-Walker (2016, 184–85). The orchestra is often referred to as the "Great Russian Orchestra" or the "State Russian Orchestra."

9. Frolova-Walker, from a different focus, considers support for regional/minority music to have been designed to “win the confidence of the peoples” (2007, 303). Many in Central Asia argue the opposite: orchestras imposed Soviet ideas as exemplars of what was required at the expense of local instrumental traditions. Similarly, among Chinese Korean musicologists in Yanbian, directives from Beijing about local cultural production in the immediate post-1949 years were part of a folding of ethnic minorities into the Communist state after the end of the Nationalist period (Kim Tökkyun 1992, 11–14). Those now outside China see things differently: Xiaomei Chen, for example, gives the example of a Uyghur-inspired but Han-written and Han-performed play, “*Yuanfang qingnian/Young Folk in a Remote Region*,” that in 1963 premiered in Beijing and then toured throughout Xinjiang (Chen 2002, 2–3). Robert Adlington moderates between such perspectives: “Marxist theory advocated the international unity of the proletariat and regarded nation states as bourgeois entities; national sentiment functioned to hold back social progress by uniting exploited and exploiter against external oppressors” (2013a, 10). Despite this, Laura Adams, in her account of Uzbekistan, argues that “Soviet internationalism was compatible with the preservation of ethnic culture” (2010, 194). The jury appears to be out.
10. I thank Zakiya Sapenova, Almaty, for this information; bibliographic documentation is given in her PhD dissertation (2018). Major cities also established orchestras, based in theaters known, after the orchestras, as *filharmonie*. Additional discussions of how instruments and orchestras were developed in specific Soviet republics include those by Nercessian (2000) and Merchant Henson (2006).
11. In the context of research on the Kyrgyz oral epic tradition of *Manas*, the shifting policies, ideologies, and practices of this period are discussed by Howard and Kasmambetov (2011, 99–103).
12. Featured in my documentaries with Misha Maltsev, *Siberia at the Centre of the World* (SOASIS DVD06 and DVD07, 2007), where the Buryat orchestra is shown alongside a Buryat Russian orchestra, both directed and discussed by the Ukrainian-trained Viktor Kitov, and where Sakha instruments are explored by German Khatylaev (see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i37putvAwuU&t=2408s> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QYXuNxxhR57Y>).
13. The former British colony of Hong Kong would later establish its own orchestra of Chinese instruments in 1977, with 85 musicians (see <http://www.hkco.org/en/index.html>).
14. *Guo* (nation) became a popular assignment from the beginning of the Nationalist period in the 1910s, distinguishing the indigenous from the imported. For an overview of the *guoyue* movement, and some of the musicologists and musicians implicated in it, see Gong 2008, 53–61. Frederick Lau, in his account of Zheng Jinwen, tracks the term back to the mid-fourteenth century, where it was used to differentiate Khitan music from that of the Han Chinese majority, via Qing-dynasty court ritual music. Lau links its everyday twentieth-century use to *guocui*, “national essence,” tracking its use in the titles of commercial publications from 1919 onward (2008, 211). But, the everyday use appears to have begun in Japan. There, as *Nihon ongaku*, though with a suffix for “Japan” rather than “nation,” it emerged as a signifier

- to separate Japanese music from the Western music introduced into educational syllabi under the default term “music” (*ongaku*) during the Meiji Restoration (for which, see Fujita 2018). In addition to being exported to China, the term appeared in Korea from 1907 onward, as *kugak* (national music), to distinguish traditional music from Western music (No 1989, 13), again because “music” (*umak*) had become synonymous with Western music. Note, too, that like *guoyue* in China, *kugak* in Korea makes an occasional appearance earlier, notably in Chŏng Sanggi’s (1678–1752) recollections, *Nongpŏmunda*. For an interesting account of how the notion of *guoyue* impacted the development of the Shanghai Conservatory, see Schimmelpenninck and Kouwenhoven 1993, 56–91.
15. McDougall’s footnote 104 gives this as an alternative to her translation “already in existence.”
  16. Discussed in respect to China by Lau (2008, 212–15, citing Chen Lingqun, Qi Yuyi, and Dai Penghai 1990; Jones 1992, 39; and Xu Guangyi 1984, 114–15).
  17. Discussions about copying from Western music can miss the intention. As Andrei Zhdanov had put it in respect to the Soviet Union, “We . . . are critically assimilating the cultural heritage of all nations and all times in order to choose from it all that can inspire the working people of Soviet society to great exploits in labor, science and culture” (1948 [1950], 96).
  18. Compare Barbara Mittler, in respect to the Chinese two-stringed fiddle, *erhu*: “Chinese instruments and playing-techniques were reformed to make *erhus* sound like violins” (1997, 274).
  19. And supplements by Pak in *Chosŏn yesul* (1994/11, 1994/12, 1995/1, 1999/1, 1999/2, 1999/3).
  20. *Marksizm i natsional’no-kolonial’niy vopros* (1934), as translated by Frolova-Walker (1998, 331). Frolova-Walker (1998, 331–71), starting from the January 1934 issue of *Sovetskaya muzika*, explores how nationalism played out in the music of the Caucasus and Central Asian republics. Maria Tagangaeva (2017, 393–409) usefully supplements Frolova-Walker’s discussion with a consideration of art in the Siberian Republic of Buryatia.
  21. Brace notes that the Chinese term combines notions of change and transformation, as well as “good” (1992, 240–41). In my coauthored volume on the Korean genre of *sanjo*, I use “modify,” based on the alternative Korean terms *pyŏn’gyŏng* and *kaejo*, because this is appropriate and sympathetic to those who continue to value tradition in South Korea (Howard, Lee, and Casswell 2008, 27). For an illustrated account of reformed traditional instruments in South Korea, see Kim Chŏngsu and Pak Sanghyŏp 2017.
  22. This celebrated treatise, completed some 15 years before any comparable European work, gives detailed prescriptions for instrument construction and performance, details music and dance repertoires, and offers historical contextualization. It remains a core text for the historical study of music in South Korea, and has been issued in several (modern) Korean versions (e.g., Yi Hyegu 1979, 2000).
  23. Note that North Korean texts refer to *nongak*, although this uses two Sino-Korean characters (for farming and music) when official policy is to employ vernacular

terms. *Nongak* has, although still being used in some official texts, lost currency to *p'ungmul* in South Korea since the 1980s, due to the widespread belief that the former was introduced by the Japanese during the early colonial period. Despite this, I referred in Chapter 1 to a campaign to promote agriculture, using the first Sino-Korean character, *nong*, mounted in the last decades of the nineteenth century—before the colonial period—leaving “*Nongbuga*/Song of Farming,” which as a popular folk song originated in a *p'ansori* repertoire (for which, in its updated North Korean version, see Notation 7.1) and, I presume, normalizing the term *nongak*.

24. In 1989, for example, eight traditional *saenap* were recorded with a band of 50 percussionists at the International Students Festival.
25. For a detailed exploration of *samulnori*, see Howard 2015b.
26. Examples include the *Chōsen shisetsu gyōretsu zukan* handscroll depicting 1655 envoys, formerly attributed to Kanō Tōun Masunobu, that is housed in the archives of SOAS, University of London (MS86566), and a later scroll considered to depict the 1748 dispatch of envoys held by the British Museum (Carpenter 2007; Lewis 2010; Howard 2017).
27. Kim Chiyōn (2001, 278) comments on a resemblance to the soprano saxophone rather than the clarinet, although the *saenap* uses blackwood like the clarinet and oboe rather than a metal body like the saxophone. I have not established what Western instruments were available to those reforming the *saenap* in 1960.
28. Attempts appear to have been made to retain the conical tube, since *Chosŏn ūmak* (1961/7, 31–34) announced a claimed new method for making them, using a series of tapered/arrowhead drill bits of increasing diameter.
29. Some Italian instruments have five; my reference to “English and French” is to modern clarinets from makers such as Boosey (and Hawkes), Yamaha, Selmer, and LeBlanc.
30. Chu described this hole as *paeŭm*, implying a harmonic.
31. Here, *ŏnmori* does not readily join two units together ( $5/8 + 5/8$ ), as would be common in the folk-art vocal and instrumental repertoires of *p'ansori* and *sanjo*. For an exemplary discussion of *ŏnmori*, see the South Korean musicologist Lee Hye-ku's article (1981).
32. While this is accurate in terms of twentieth-century shawms in both North and South Korea, many instruments in Korea have over the centuries been imported from China, where, in turn, many shawms are longer. Some iconography for Korean envoy processions and court activities, including the *Chōsen shisetsu gyōretsu zukan* handscroll I discuss elsewhere (Howard 2017), show longer instruments than those used today.
33. Except in North Korea, measurements for instruments are routinely taken from the top of the body to the holes, since this relates to the sounding length of the tube (from mouthpiece to hole) and, therefore, to the pitch produced. But, given that the manufactured length of the *chang saenap* body is always the same, the Pyongyang method of specifying lengths the other way around (from base of instrument to hole) makes no significant difference.

34. The four sizes from 1963 are pictured in *Chosŏn ūmak* (1965/7) and are discussed by Yi Chinwŏn (2014, 110). The two 1968 versions are pictured in *Chosŏn yesul* (1968/12).
35. Published by Munye ch'ulp'ansa.
36. Grass and reed pipes, and leaves, can be added to the list of oboes, for a discussion of which, see Howard 2015a, 259–61 (citing Kwak T'aechŏn 1988 and Yi Chinwŏn 1994). I encountered an old woman selling reed pipes in an underpass near Pyongyang railway station one evening in 1992.
37. *So* means “small,” but the instrument is associated in one catalogue with the traditional *se p'iri* (Kim T'aeyŏn 2001, 62–63), although *se* translates as “slender” and denotes an instrument usually used in traditional music to accompany singers.
38. *Yangsando* is the name of a folk song from the region surrounding Pyongyang, combining the names of two places, Yangdŏk and Maengsan.
39. Wooden flutes and piccolos were common in Western usage until recent decades and remain standard in many folk traditions.
40. Pease (2001, 156), in contrast, cites the explanation by Du Yaxiong (1993) for why the *t'ungso* was not reformed among Chinese Koreans in Yanbian: its vibrato was too wide, and its tone too unusual.
41. Compare Brian Myers's observation of the southern faction writer Han Sŏrya's distinction between the progressive culture of the masses and old court and literati culture (where xenophobic flunkeyism was seen in how old Korea looked up to the latter) with Charles Armstrong's observation that flunkeyism is the antithesis of *juche* ideology, relating, rather than to self-reliance, to a dependence on others—to, for example, Chinese culture and practices from the past, and Soviet culture and practices in the period prior to 1956 (Myers 1994, 44–45; Armstrong 2014, 92–93).
42. Recent research at the National Gugak Center in Seoul has measured the time taken for a tone on traditional instruments to reach a steady-state. The attack portion of a tone sounded on a *tanso*, in which breathy elements and multiple frequencies feature, is longer than on Western flutes, due to the material (bamboo) and the small notch of the mouthpiece. To counter this, South Koreans have experimented with using hardwood and plastic for *tanso* bodies (see Yi Yongshik 2008a, 128–41; for the *taegŭm*, see also Yi Yongshik 2008b and Chu Chaegŭn 2014).
43. Specifically, 1993/8, 1993/9, 2000/2, 2000/3, 2002/12.
44. It is tempting to see in this an attempt to resolve the concerns Jiang Qing expressed about the balance of Western and reformed Chinese instruments in the Chinese model works that preceded North Korea's revolutionary operas (Mittler 1997, 284; see also Melvin and Cai 2004, 244–45).
45. Chong Pong Sok [Chŏng Pongsŏk], cited from his paper at the Sixth Asian Music Symposium, October 1983.
46. Anon. *Sonp'unggŭm kyoch'ŭkpon (taehak yong)* (Pyongyang: Kyoyuk tosŏ ch'ulp'ansa, 1971).
47. Cited from a 2001 South Korean article, <http://nk.chosun.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=10221>. Bradley Martin's speculation that Kim Il Sung may have favored

the accordion due to his claimed playing of the harmonium in a Methodist church in Jilin during his youth should be considered speculative (Martin 2004, 792).

48. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rBgMeunuvIE>.
49. Or, taking my lead from Annie Proulx (1996), could there be crimes associated with the accordion?

### Chapter 3

1. Published by 2.16 Yesul kyoyuk ch'ulp'ansa. The 2001 catalogue includes grainy photographs of court and literati musicians from the past, rather than avoiding discussion of music deemed outside the sphere of the proletariat.
2. For details, see Yu Miyŏng 2013, 60; No Chaemyŏng 2013, 346–48, 361. An also recorded a number of SPs during the colonial period on which he played the *kŏmun'go*, the first released in 1929. Compare this, though, to the entry on An in a dictionary of musicians produced in Yanbian (Kim and Kim 1998, 445–47), where he is introduced solely as a *kayagŭm* musician.
3. Kim uses the term “*ch'ang*” for singing, but the context for his remark is a discussion of vocal quality in which he contrasts what had by then become unacceptable *p'ansori* (epic storytelling through song) vocalization to the “beautiful” voices of “most Koreans.” See Chapter 5.
4. Kim Il Sung, “On creating revolutionary literature and art,” a speech to workers in the fields of literature and art, November 7, 1964, reprinted in *Selected Works* 4 (1971, 149–64; grammar adjusted).
5. Laurence Picken (1965, 84) notes that the Chinese version, the *yazheng*, is made to “creak with a slip of bamboo moistened at its tip.” Curiously, in Korea, the Sino-Korean character “a” used from the fifteenth-century *Akhak kwebŏm* until today is different to that used in China and actually signifies molar teeth.
6. See Chapter 5.
7. “On the *juche* idea: treatise sent to the national seminar on the *juche* idea, held to mark the seventieth birthday of the Great Leader Comrade Kim Il Sung,” March 31, 1982.
8. As discussed in Chapter 2, the *ragak* had nonetheless been reformed in the 1960s.
9. For brief descriptions of these drums, see Howard 2015a, 71–73.
10. Chŏng moved to the North during the Korean War and was appointed merit artist in 1952 and people's artist in 1959. He worked with Pak Tongshil on the staging of the old *p'ansori* story “*Shimchŏngjŏn*/Story of the Filial Daughter” at the National Arts Theater (see Chapter 5), and was later charged with leading the national music division of the Music and Dance University for a decade until 1970. He died away from Pyongyang in North Hamgyŏng in 1984. Chŏng's *sanjo* remained influential in South Korea, where for political reasons it was for many years labeled as the *sanjo* of his disciple, Kim Yundŏk; Kim made a number of additions during the 1950s and 1960s. In 1990 the Seoul-based *kayagŭm* specialist Hwang Pyŏnggi (1936–2018) traveled to Pyongyang as head of a delegation of South Korean artists and returned with recordings and notations of Chŏng's *sanjo*, which he then combined with his own



- memories and practice—he had studied with both Chŏng and Kim, but claimed to never have accepted Kim’s changes. Hwang created what he labeled as the “Chŏng-style Hwang-school” *sanjo* (Hwang 1998; see also Killick 2017).
11. “Black zither,” from *hyŏnhakkŭm*, “black crane zither.” A legend in the twelfth-century History of the Three Kingdoms relates that when Wang Sanak, the Koguryŏ-based inventor of the *kŏmun’go*, played, a black crane flew into the room and danced. Cranes are auspicious symbols of longevity throughout East Asia.
  12. Sŏng began her career during the colonial period, and was appointed holder for *kayagŭm sanjo* as National Intangible Cultural Property 23. In 1979 she migrated to Hawai’i with her husband, the celebrated *haegŭm* fiddle musician Chi Yŏnghŭi, and her appointment as holder was cancelled.
  13. Nylon, it has been stated to me many times, is stronger than silk, but this simplifies the situation: the strength (measured in denier) of wound silk increases with thickness and/or the number of strands used, but the thicker the string the less resonance.
  14. One example of this appears, albeit briefly, in the film *Liberation Day* (2016), documenting the Slovenian group Laibach’s concert in Pyongyang.
  15. In later life, Kim became an important music educator in Seoul as well as holder of two National Intangible Cultural Properties within the South Korean preservation system. His first credited composition was “*Hwanghwa mannyŏn chigok*/Eternal Imperialism” (1939) which, given its implicit support for the continuation of colonialism (“*mannyŏn*” literally means “10,000 years”), is no longer performed. Indeed, three years after writing “Eternal Imperialism,” Kim temporarily abandoned music and set up a business in Manchuria. Some scholars have suggested this was because of criticism of the piece, although opportunities for those in the traditional music world were acutely limited during the Pacific War. See Howard 2006a, 110–14.
  16. Much ornamentation is specific to an instrument, and this only began to be addressed in Seoul in the new millennium, particularly when the composer Wŏn Il (b. 1968; personal discussion, London, July 2015), as conductor of the National Traditional Music Orchestra (Kungnip kugak kwanhyŏn aktan), encouraged orchestral musicians to focus not on ornamentation but on melodic lines.
  17. For details of these court instruments, see Howard 2015a, 97, 102–103.
  18. The 1962 and 1966 collections were published by the Chosŏn munhak yesul chŏngdongmaeng ch’ulp’ansa, and the 1969 collection by Munye ch’ulp’ansa.
  19. Octagonal in the case of the *erhu*, but my point is that, unlike in Yanbian, it was not reshaped to resemble the body of a violin.
  20. Han Namyong (1983, 297) lists the woods used for all parts of the instrument.
  21. The Koryŏ dynasty, with its capital in Kaesŏng in today’s North Korea, was established in 918 and lasted until ousted by the Chosŏn in 1392.
  22. Cited, with adjustments, from Yu Youngmin’s (2007, 64) translation of “Minjok munhwa yusanessŏ nasŏnŭn myŏtkaji munje-e taehayŏ (On some questions arising in inheriting national cultural heritage),” a speech given on February 17, 1970.
  23. The *tae haegŭm* in the 1962 source is shown as having only three strings.
  24. Ethnomusicologists would, to the contrary, insist that the European way is not the only way.



25. Ri, in turn, may have been reflecting on an article by Shim Chaegi that explored Kreislerian virtuosity in *Chosŏn ūmak* (1966/2, 38–39).
26. The similarity with this same alternation between solo/small group and ensemble/orchestra and the European Baroque *concerto grosso* style has been noted in respect to Chinese compositions (Pischner 1955, 123) but, in North Korea, as explored in Chapter 8, it results from the requirement to keep song melodies intact.
27. See Kim and Kim 1998, 176; Mun Chaesuk 2013, 157.
28. An additional lute associated with the Koguryŏ state, the *wanham*, is listed by North Korean musicologists. This was a type of moon lute similar to the *wŏlgŭm*. For a discussion of the various *pip'a* in Korean history, see Song 1973.
29. Published by the 2.16 yesul kyoyuk ch'ulp'ansa.
30. Attempts have, however, been made to backdate its introduction, to “after the sixteenth century” (Chang Sahun 1976, 242–43).
31. Discussed in Howard 2015b, 13–18.
32. Using new materials is not confined to North Korea. In Kwangju, to Korea's southwest, I encountered thin aluminium being used for drum bodies in the 1980s, and ratchets were added by a southwestern, Taegu-based, drum maker in the early 2000s. Many European and American drum suppliers have explored alternative materials to animal skins for heads.
33. See Pak Hyŏngsŏp 1994, 543, and also [http://www.arko.or.kr/home2005/bodo/sub/north\\_news.jsp?idx=784&pid=606](http://www.arko.or.kr/home2005/bodo/sub/north_news.jsp?idx=784&pid=606) and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eXNG5Umlnoc&list=PL4tB0b7HpRjWg9zrdZbsrubIOghP39r-W>. I thank Xosé Crisanto Gándara for alerting me to these sites and for sharing photographs with me.
34. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the harp is backdated in some sources to the putative first Korean state.
35. Since the Erard sequence is ♭, ♯, ♯, it could be said that the single fork complicates the required playing technique. However, the lack of chromaticism in North Korean music makes this observation largely academic.
36. In the late eighteenth century, early pianos had a five-octave range, typically F'–f''', and this was the range exploited by Mozart, Haydn, and many of their contemporaries in piano compositions.

## Chapter 4

1. Some translate *p'ansori* as “one-man opera” or “musical drama” (e.g., Um 2013); I prefer the gloss given here. Killick provides an account of *ch'anggŭk* as “traditional opera,” pointing to possible connections to Chinese and Japanese forms (2010, 30–34, 54–72) and suggesting distant parallels with Western opera (see, in particular, 2010, 212–13).
2. “On some problems of education in the Juche idea,” a talk to senior officials of the Central Committee of the Korean Workers Party, July 15, 1986 (published as a booklet, 1987, 1–2). Romanization adjusted. Also, at <http://www.korea-dpr.info/>

- lib/Kim%20Jong%20Il%20-%204/ON%20SOME%20PROBLEMS%20OF%20EDUCATION%20IN%20THE%20JUCHE%20IDEA.pdf.
3. “Young people must accomplish the revolutionary cause of Juche, upholding the leadership of the Party,” a letter addressed to the Eighth Congress of the League of Socialist Working Youth, January 22, 1993 (1993, 5).
  4. Han (1999) offers a further consideration, while Hyun Ok Park (2005) discusses Korean nationalism in Manchuria.
  5. De Ceuster (1994, 140–75) and Schmid (2002) discuss intellectual movements in the 1890s and early 1900s.
  6. For English-language discussions of *Shilhak*, see Kalton 1975; Shin Yong-Ha 1990; Setton 1992, 37–80.
  7. The first reference to juche in *Chosŏn ūmak* that I am aware of comes in an article considering the “juche direction” in music by the composer Kim Wŏngyun in July 1958. The composer Shin Tosŏn applied it to popular songs in June 1959, and, a year later, editorials and articles state juche was being used to remodel folk songs, operas, and popular songs (e.g., 1960/9, 1960/10, 1960/12).
  8. See also Clark 2008.
  9. Although based on fieldwork in Seoul, Harkness’s (2014) comprehensive analysis of Korean vocal style—and deportment—is compulsory reading. Note that something akin to the hybrid “juche voice” is used in the Chinese Korean “Song of Dragon River” (Pease 2016, 175), but this postdates when this vocal style was worked out in Pyongyang.
  10. For a discussion of similar deportment/comportment elements in respect to Albanian socialist music, see Tochka 2017, 293–95.
  11. See Chapter 8.
  12. See <http://www.koryogroup.com>. The company, set up by Nick Bonner, is international coordinator for the Pyongyang International Film Festival and has also collaborated on the production of a series of documentaries that include, with Daniel Gordon, *The Game of Their Lives* (2002), *A State of Mind* (2004), and *Crossing the Line* (2005), and with Dutch collaborators the film *Comrade Kim Goes Flying* (2012). “Koryo” is taken from the former Korean dynasty, Koryŏ (918–1392), which had its capital in Kaesŏng in the south of today’s North Korea and which descended indirectly from the northernmost of Korea’s earlier Three Kingdoms, Koguryŏ (traditional dates 37 BCE–660 CE).
  13. [http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction\\_Review-g294444-d459859-Reviews-Revolutionary\\_Opera-Pyongyang.html](http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction_Review-g294444-d459859-Reviews-Revolutionary_Opera-Pyongyang.html).
  14. For one clip of a performance in which Kim Jong Il sits alongside the then Chinese leader, Wen Jiaobao, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aLBqCE1f2SQ>.
  15. [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/29/arts/29iht-sea.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/29/arts/29iht-sea.html?_r=1).
  16. *On the Art of Opera* lists “True Daughter” as the fourth revolutionary opera to be premiered, positioned after “Oh! Tell.” This delineates its revised, rather than initial, version.
  17. Kim T’ŭkchŏng (1992, 187–90). According to a celebratory book, *Mansudae Arts Troupe/Mansudae yesuldan* (1971), published by the Foreign Languages Publishing

- House, in the first half of 1971 the troupe performed in the Soviet Union, Cuba, Romania, Bulgaria, Iraq, and “many other lands,” demonstrating that the “arts of Chollima [Chöllima] Korea are now flourishing fully.”
18. Officially, a talk given to creative workers in the field of art and literature, September 4–6, 1974. Available at <http://www.korea-dpr.info/lib/Kim%20Jong%20Il%20-%203/ON%20THE%20ART%20OF%20OPERA.pdf>.
  19. Migration began to increase around 1860 but accelerated rapidly in the 1880s after China lifted its *fengjin* policy. Koreans were granted land tenancies in the provinces of Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang, and some moved further northward and eastward to what became the Soviet Far East, where they were offered Russian citizenship from 1884 onward.
  20. Suzy Kim notes that Sino-Korean was used for all record keeping by the northern regime during its early years and was therefore done by an elite. With increasing literacy came the ominous requirement, taken from Soviet practice, for citizens to provide dossiers that detailed themselves, their parents, their contributions to the revolutionary struggle before 1945, arrests, language competency, the names of witnesses to their character, and so on. By the late 1950s, according to the defector and sister of Kim Jong Il's mistress, Sŏng Hyerang, “every nook and cranny of an individual's life was subject to investigation” (cited in Kim Hyung-chan and Kim Dong-kyu 2005, 81).
  21. Mount Fuji is memorialized in, for example, Hokusai's (1760–1849) “100 Views of Mount Fuji” woodblock prints, first printed in 1834 and 1835. One of Hokusai's depictions shows Koreans admiring the mountain, complete with Korean musicians playing trumpet, shawm, fiddle, drums, and gongs (Howard 2017).
  22. Cumings (2004, 110) assesses Korean documentation for this massacre.
  23. In the recent past, women were often known simply as “sister of x,” “wife of x,” and “mother of x” (“x” marking the names of male family members), rather than by a given name. This practice persisted because, during much of the colonial period, and despite legal requirements, many girls were not registered at birth and very few attended school. Instead, girls were confined to the family compound, and to the limited universe of their male relations, where a personal name would serve little purpose.
  24. See Chapter 6 for an explanation of *pangchàng*.
  25. The ultimate insult is the characterization of Koreans living in poverty in the eastern Kangwŏn province given by the fifteenth-century scholar Yi T'ŏegye. Yi described them as “potato eaters.”
  26. In the 1990s, the failure of the distribution system was a prelude to famine.
  27. Today the hill is a park, full of statues and sculptures commemorating Kim Il Sung's role in the revolution, but also a recreational space for picnics and parties. Korhonen and Cathcart (2017, 11) stretch this last point, suggesting, somewhat erroneously, that it is the only place in the capital where locals and foreigners mingle.
  28. Hazel Smith offers a recent account of the Mount Paektu mythology used by the family cult (2015, 60ff).
  29. See also the January 10, 1946, Soviet report, translated as *The Japanese Population in Korea and the Korean Population in Manchuria*, at <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter>.

- org/document/122241. The 1985 Chinese census recorded 1,765,000 citizens of Korean descent, about 40 percent of whom lived in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture in Jilin Province (to the north of Mount Paektu), where the first Korean school in Manchuria had opened in 1906. Accounts of the Chinese Korean population include those by Chae-Jin Lee (1986) and Olivier (1993), while English-language discussions of music among the community include PhD dissertations by Pease (2001) and Koo (2007).
30. Images of rivers and mountains (or, in this translation, hills) are characteristic of traditional ink landscape paintings. See Hwi-joon Ahn 1998 and Ch'oe Wan-su 2005.
  31. See Chapter 1: 3,000 *ri/li* is traditionally given as the longitudinal distance from the south to the north of the Korean peninsula.
  32. A vivid picture of the change, comparing Mun Tuho and Pak Munhoe before the colonial period, the first a member of a wealthy and powerful family, and the second a peasant, who could hardly talk to or understand each other, and their sons and grandsons who had become members of the same exclusive social club by the time of liberation in 1945, is brilliantly drawn by Carter Eckert (1991, 1–3).
  33. “The revolutionary opera ‘The Sea of Blood’ is a new opera of a type of our own,” a speech to the creators of the revolutionary opera, July 17, 1971, as translated at <http://www.korea.dpr.com>. Note that much of the speech is reprised in Kim’s 1974 treatise, *On the Art of Opera*.
  34. I have in mind Soviet music policy, where in the 1930s Tchaikovsky along with Glinka and The Five were “repatriated, mythologized, and presented as the only legitimate starting point for the future development of Soviet music” (Frolova-Walker 1998, 333). Representing a Russian nationalism that could replace modernism, Tchaikovsky was still celebrated at the time of Zhdanov’s 1948 criticism of composers (for which, see Fairclough 2016, 2–6)—when Soviet cultural advisers were active in North Korea.
  35. “Let us produce revolutionary operas that are high in ideological and artistic quality,” a talk to officials in the field of art and literature, October 28, 1971. At <http://www.korea.dpr.com>.
  36. Staged versions of both dances were popularized by Ch'oe Sŭnghŭi; see Chapter 7.
  37. Videos online (<http://www.dprktoday.com/index.php?type=24&no=2972> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcniwJn2iuU>) feature the 22-meter bronze statue of Kim Il Sung erected on Mansudae a year later, in 1972, rather than filmed images of Kim.
  38. <http://nkleadershipwatch.files.wordpress.com/2009/10/choikgyu.pdf>.
  39. Rowan Pease (2016) explores how much the same happened in the same period when a transplanted Chinese model opera, “Song of the Dragon River,” was subjected to layer upon layer of censorship as it was adapted for the Korean minority population in northeast China.
  40. Were these models for the actress Sun Moon in Adam Johnson’s 2013 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Orphan Master’s Son*?

41. Videos from both South and North exist. Compare <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ujt3seEb6BM> with <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5ekfvAmP9I&feature=related>). Kim Min'gi's lyrics run:

Like the morning dew, after a long weary night,  
Gracing each leaf with a shimmer finer than pearls,  
When sorrows in my heart bead up one by one,  
I climb the morning hill to learn a small smile.

For discussions of Kim, and details of how his songs were banned in South Korea, see Kim Ch'angnam 1986 and Okon Hwang 2006.

42. The oft-repeated story is related by Johannes Schönherr (2012, 43), citing a booklet, "Great Man and Cinema," circulated at the seventh Pyongyang International Film Festival. See also Fischer 2015, 40.
43. Courtesans in the second and third divisions were *samp'ae* private hostesses and *yōsadangp'ae* female itinerant troupe members. The *samp'ae* unofficially practiced prostitution (Pilzer 2006, 297), while *yōsadangp'ae* more openly traded sex for payment.
44. See Yi Nūnghwa 1992, 440–43; Kwōn Tohūi 2002; Pilzer 2006; SungHee Park 2011.
45. A recent article that rehearses the historical documentation on slavery is by Rhee and Yang (2010).
46. See, in respect to folk song, Hughes 2008.
47. Whether shamanic practices have totally disappeared is not known, since some visitors to North Korea have reported seeing symbols of shamanism, such as cairns marking paths over mountains or ropes with paper strips tied to trees, despite the official prohibition.
48. The best-known landscape depictions are by Chōng Sōn (1676–1759), who is credited with developing the "true view" style.
49. In 1998 an agreement between the two Koreas was reached through which the South Korean conglomerate Hyundai, whose founder had been born in North Korean territory, developed a hotel and tourist resort in the mountain. South Koreans began to visit, their number passing a million by June 2005. This provided income for the northern state, but the project collapsed in 2008 after a South Korean tourist was shot and killed by a North Korean soldier (Park 2013).
50. Explored, from a southern perspective, in Foley 2002.

## Chapter 5

1. Xiaomei Chen (2002, 75–78) distinguishes the initial eight model works from additional later works, and both Paul Clark (2008) and Barbara Mittler (2012) point out that the Cultural Revolution period should not be regarded as a cultural desert with little cultural creativity. Because of the dates when North Korea's five revolutionary operas premiered, I do not here consider the later Chinese works.

2. In the official telling, American forces had suffered once before at the hands of a Kim family member, when the vessel the General Sherman, having sailed up the Taedong River toward Pyongyang in 1875, was set on fire and sunk by none other than Kim's grandfather. A plaque today marks the spot on the riverbank where it purportedly sank, adjacent to Kim Il Sung's birthplace, Man'gyŏngdae.
3. Pang relates big character posters to "*Dujuanshan/Azalea Mountain*" (2017, 155), a Chinese work that Chapter 7 will link to a North Korean dance work.
4. Katerina Clark (1978) writes about the turn away from the early Soviet emphasis on individual heroes, replaced by what she terms "the cult of little men," that is, ordinary workers. See also Bonnell 1994.
5. Suk-Young Kim (2010, 228ff) discusses how fashion is controlled by the state, noting the oxymoronic use of *chosŏn ot* (a costume in South Korea known as *hanbok*).
6. Some question whether Shim was indeed abducted, and any claim of abduction sits uncomfortably in Pyongyang, but this is the conclusion of those who have investigated his story, including Steven Chung (2014) and Fischer (2015).
7. See also Schönherr 2012, 72–98; Steven Chung 2014; Mironenko 2014; Fischer 2015.
8. Kim Il Sung's memoir, *With the Century*, states that he encountered Gorky's novel in Chinese translation while attending Yuwen middle school, but this contrasts with his comment elsewhere in the same memoir that, when developing "Sea of Blood" in the 1930s, a partisan suggested he should center his play around a Korean woman who had seen her husband and child massacred by Japanese troops.
9. In 1932, VOKS employed just five cultural officers out of a total workforce of 90 at its Moscow headquarters. The classic text on Soviet cultural diplomacy is by Barghoorn (1960).
10. That is, dated from the beginning of the legendary rule of Tan'gun in 2333 BCE, and rounding up to 5,000.
11. Nationalism, rather than statism (*kukka chu'ii*).
12. As introduced in Chapter 2. Armstrong uses this phrase to contrast cultural practice with "revolutionary romanticism," one of the markers of Soviet socialist realism (for which, see Clark 1981, 33–34), but also used by some in respect to North Korean literature (see, for example, Kim Chaeyŏng 1994, 21).
13. In fact, David-West's starting point is a critique of Myers's (2006) claim that *juche* is not nationalist.
14. In China, though, a Korean militia was well established, with a propaganda team attached to each unit that utilized music and other performance arts. Sun Hee Koo gives the example of the Yanbian Culture and Arts Work Team, which was the predecessor of the post-1948 Yanbian Song and Dance Troupe (Koo 2007, 43–44).
15. Janet Poole (2014) discusses seven writers who were active toward the end of the colonial period, six of whom subsequently settled in North Korea. All seven are today criticized in South Korea as Japanese collaborators. In the Korean case, then, modernity can be considered a by-product of colonization.
16. "Workers in culture should become combatants on the cultural front," a speech at a meeting of propagandists of the Provincial People's Committees, political parties and social organizations, cultural workers and artists; and "Musicians should make

- an active contribution to building a new, democratic Korea,” a speech to artists after a performance in honor of the founding of the Central Symphony Orchestra, in *Kim Il Sung Works* 2 (1980, 206–10, 298–300). Other speeches by Kim in 1946 incorporate the same threads, calling for a national culture that is more than Marxist-Leninist, and in which intellectuals create literature and art for the people. See, for instance, “Twenty-point platform,” radio address, March 23, 1946, and “On the results of the inaugural congress of the Workers’ Party of North Korea,” a speech delivered at a meeting of activists of the party organization in South P’yŏngan Province, September 9, 1946, in *Kim Il Sung Selected Works* 1 (1971, 34, 94–95, 97).
17. Another English version is published in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* 3 (1965, 69–98).
  18. “Talk with writers and artists,” June 30, 1951, in *Kim Il Sung Selected Works* 1 (1971 305–12). Compare Kim’s statements here with Mao’s “Talks” (e.g., McDougall 1980, 64, 65, 66, 68, 69).
  19. Published in *Sovetskaya muzika* 1 (1948, 14–26). Reprinted in Zhdanov 1950, chap. 3, and at [http://www.marxists.org/subject/art/lit\\_crit/zhdanov/lit-music-philosophy.htm](http://www.marxists.org/subject/art/lit_crit/zhdanov/lit-music-philosophy.htm).
  20. “Great event in state-building history,” *Korean Central News Agency*, August 21, 1998, formerly at <http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/1998/9808/news08/21.htm#8> (deleted).
  21. See, “The Zhdanov Decree 1948,” [http://dschjournal.com/wordpress/onlinearticles/dsch09\\_zhdanov.pdf](http://dschjournal.com/wordpress/onlinearticles/dsch09_zhdanov.pdf). The decree details are beyond my scope here, and even Frolova-Walker sensibly prefaces her discussion (2016, 222–57) with the comment, “the story is long and complex.”
  22. Tchaikovsky was given pride of place in the late 1930s and early 1940s in the Soviet Union as ideology shifted from modernity to the classical (Romantic) Russian tradition (Fairclough 2016, 158–65).
  23. Mikhail Glinka (1804–1857) was the first major composer to gain national status in Russia. His importance during the late Tsarist period remained considerable, and his “Life for the Tsar” opened opera seasons through to 1916. Glinka regained his position as the founder of the national style when Russian opera was restored as part of the shift back to the classical tradition in the later 1930s: “Ruslan and Ludmila” was staged at the Bolshoi in 1937, and two years later “Life for the Tsar,” duly revised to omit references to the Tsar and retitled as “Ivan Susanin,” returned. See Gaub 2003.
  24. See also Redepennin 2008, 301–22.
  25. The upper components of this hierarchical structure, as it operated in 1980, are discussed by Seekins (1981, 97ff), who notes a double screening of all cultural production by a committee within the federation and then by Party censors. In fact, screening occurs at all levels.
  26. See also Kwahak paekkwajajŏn (2002).
  27. Kim Jong Il, *On the Art of Opera* (1974, 12–13).
  28. Hence, between 1972 and the beginning of 1975, the pages of the journal *Chosŏn yesul* include myriad considerations of “*P’i pada-shik*”—“after [following the style of] Sea of Blood”—linking to juche and to socialist (*sahoe chu’i*) practice. Due to

- its association with Kim Jong Il, “Flower Girl” became central to this construction alongside “Sea of Blood” and, over time, the construction became monolithic, generating the theoretical texts of, for example, Han and Chŏng (1983), Ham Tŏgil (1984), Kim et al. (1985), Kim and Rim (1991) and Kim Chŏewŏn (1991).
29. A comprehensive South Korean account covering the mechanisms and the changes from the 1960s through to the 1980s is given by No and Song (1990, 116–28).
  30. <http://www.liberationday.film/film/>.
  31. Howard (2013) gives an overview of the introduction of Western music. Useful South Korean accounts are by Yi Yusŏn and Yi Sangman (1984), Song Pangsŏng (1984), Yi Yusŏn (1985), and Yi Kangsuk (2001).
  32. Ronconi had a following in Japan. He can be heard on an SP reissued as part of *A Selection of Japanese 78 rpm Recordings III* (Rohm Music Foundation RMFSP-E018—RMFSP-EO24, 2007).
  33. The journal *Chosŏn ūmak* published six brief discussions of this in July 1958 (1958/7, 33–43).
  34. Before the advent of theaters, performances took place in clubs and houses, in farmer’s dug-outs, in market places, and so on. Although there is no comparable documentation for Pyongyang, an instructive discussion of the venues around Seoul at the dawn of the twentieth century is provided by Sung Hee Park (2014).
  35. Texts on *pʻansori*, including accounts of its history and its five inherited stories include Pihl 1994; Park 2003; Jang 2013; Um 2013; Yates-Lu 2017. In the 1980s, I introduced the term “epic” in relation to *pʻansori* (hence, “epic storytelling through song”), intending to indicate length rather than allying the genre to Homeric epic poetry. In more recent writing on the Kyrgyz *Manas* (Howard and Kasmambetov 2011), however, I position *pʻansori* alongside Central Asian epic poetry, linking Korea to the traditions theorized about by Albert Lord (1960) and others.
  36. For the development of *chʻanggŭk*, see Killick 2010.
  37. After the genre was effectively discarded, *Chosŏn ūmak* was still able to list all *chʻanggŭk* performed in Pyongyang through to 1964 (1965/10, 44). See also Pae In’gyo 2015.
  38. For a discussion of *Paebaengi kut*, and its performances throughout the twentieth century, see Maliangkay 2012.
  39. Haekyung Um offers a flip side to this argument: “The *pʻansori* ethos is deeply conventional and the aesthetics traditionally constructed, therefore this genre is not completely in harmony with contemporary Korean desires for modernity and progress” (2013, 2). However, Hyangjin Lee discusses how the Confucian old and socialist new were negotiated in 1980 and 1985 North Korean films of one of the inherited *pʻansori* repertoires, the Ch’unhyang tale—the first, she asserts, more successfully than the second (2000, 84–90).
  40. The aristocracy, *ryangban* (in South Korea, minus the initial “r,” *yangban*), literally implies scholarly officials, its two syllables denoting two orders of civil and military officers. In 1910 *ryangban* accounted for around 3 percent of the population, while 65 percent and 69 percent of tax receipts in 1905 and 1906, respectively, came from



- commoners (*sangmin*), of which, in turn, around 75 percent were tenant farmers working holdings averaging just 2.5 acres (Howard 1996).
41. Date according to Chu Yöngsöp (1956, 138), although the program booklet for the national opera version held at Pyongyang Grand Theater in 2001 gives 1947.
  42. Reissued on three CDs on the Synnara label: *Pukhan ch'anggük Ch'unhyangjön*. See <http://nk.chosun.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=82636> and [http://m.ohmynews.com/NWS\\_Web/Mobile/at\\_pg.aspx?CNTN\\_CD=A0000347839&CMPT\\_CD=MSEB17](http://m.ohmynews.com/NWS_Web/Mobile/at_pg.aspx?CNTN_CD=A0000347839&CMPT_CD=MSEB17). Discussions of this revival continued for four years in the journal *Chosön ūmak* (for example, 1962/8, 1964/6 and 1966/9).
  43. The known discussions are outlined in a volume compiled by Hwang Chunyön (2002, 104–11) that cites articles by Ri Hirim, Chu Yöngsöp, and Mun Chongsang in the 1956 volume *Haebanghu Chosön ūmak*, and by others, including Mun Hayön. Of these, Mun Chongsang (1922–1995) was a composer who studied between 1947 and 1953 in Leningrad, and Mun Hayön (1909–1987) served as head of the vocal department at the Pyongyang Music College.
  44. For example, *Chosön ūmak* 1958/2, 1961/1, 1961/3, 1961/4, 1961/5, 1961/6, 1961/7, 1961/9, 1962/2, and 1962/12.
  45. The folk song origin was also promoted by some in Pyongyang, including Chöe Ch'angnim (1964, 11). Pease (2011) discusses how some in the Chinese Korean community claimed the vocalization to be “unscientific.”
  46. For which, in respect to gender, see Francesca Sborgi Lawson 2017.
  47. While entries on Pak in the primary North Korean and Chinese Korean dictionaries provide basic information, the Seoul-based Chöng Pyönghön (2002, 2013) has provided details about his life and work.
  48. Commemorated in the North Korean film “*An Chunggün idüngpangmunül ssoda*/An Chunggün Shoots Itô Hirobumi” (1979), at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oh1faP9aQj0>.
  49. *Chosön ūmak* 1957/5, 1957/9, 1960/1, 1960/2.
  50. Note that this could be applied to many *p'ansori* singers who remained in South Korea and who had worked in *ch'anggük* troupes during the colonial period. If so, then the long and professionalized *p'ansori* of today's South Korea may be considered an evolution rather than a continuation of a preexisting genre.
  51. The familiar image of *kat* wide-brimmed horsehair hats reflects a custom in which, until the *kabo* reforms of the mid-1890s, Korean men did not cut their hair but gathered it in top-knots. The hat functioned to hold the top-knot in place.
  52. *Kim Il Sung Selected Works* 1 (1964, 159–61)
  53. Published by Chosön ūmak ch'ulp'ansa.
  54. Ro Ikhwä and Wö'n Minhyang 2011.
  55. Photos of the 1966 revival appear in the front pages of *Chosön ūmak* (1966/4). In June 1964, the journal published nine short articles about making *ch'anggük* suitable for the new Korea, and between April and June 1966 it supplemented these with three personal reflections by Pak Tongshil (in 1966/4, 1966/5, and 1966/6) in which he argued the genre's historical importance: it developed as a reflection of the situation

- faced by the country and its people under Japanese colonialism, and he, of course, had been part of that development from the early days.
56. The standard view, credited to An Chanil, is that the Chinese tour was intended to pave the way for a leadership summit. An, head of the World North Korea Research Center, was speaking for a 2015 news report that contrasted the suddenly curtailed 2015 Beijing concerts of the all-girl band Moranbong (Kim Hyo-jin 2015; also, see Chapter 9).
  57. See Chapter 3 for Hwang's connection to Chŏng Namhŭi, the zither performer and singer who had settled in North Korea.
  58. Reviewed in *Chosŏn ūmak* (1958/12, 1959/1, 1959/2, 1959/10, 1962/10).
  59. Songs from this opera are included in *Chosŏn myŏnggokchip* 3 (1975); a score was published in 1975 and a libretto in 1976.
  60. Kim Jong Il, "The ideological and artistic characteristics of the masterpiece, the 'Fate of a Self-Defence Corps Man,'" answers to questions raised by the artists producing the film, February 14, 1970.
  61. Songs from these two operas are notated in *Chosŏn ūmak chŏnjip* 3 (1983, 380–481). Although a preface states both were produced in the 1971–1974 period, and librettos I have consulted carry the dates 1975, with scores published in 1977, the dates given here are those in Ro Ikhwa and Wŏn Minhyang 2011.
  62. The lack of a capital "s" is intentional; Pyongyang at the time did not recognize the southern state.
  63. The librettos for both, and a score for "Songs Under the Graceful Sunshine," were published in 1975, while scores I have consulted for "Yŏnp'ung Lake" are dated 1977—this may indicate revisions to orchestration and content were made after the premiere.
  64. The publication date given on the full score I have consulted is 1988, when the work was revived to celebrate the state's fortieth anniversary, but it had also been revived three years earlier in 1985, when it featured in the *Chosŏn ūmak ryŏng'am* yearbook (1986, 229–70).
  65. Adding to this impression, it is notable that cassettes of national instruments long ago vanished from sale in Pyongyang, and I have yet to find any CD featuring recordings only of national instruments.

## Chapter 6

1. The claims made for *pangch'ang* are also set out in Kim Chun'gyu 1984.
2. Kim Ch'ŏewŏn, cited from his paper given at the Sixth Asian Music Symposium, October 1983. A more discursive account of *pangch'ang*, echoing Kim Wŏn'gyun's comments and setting out the elements bundled together to this point, is by Ham Tŏgil (1984).
3. As I was reminded by Zhang Boyu, a Chinese musicologist (and colleague), when I introduced the song at a conference in Rotterdam in 1995.

4. Lisa Burnett cites Carl Dalhaus (1985), Carolyn Abbate (1991), and Matther Bribitzer-Stull (2015) in respect to the concept of *topoi* in Wagner's operas, but also Taruskin (2008) for the Soviet Union and Isobel Wong (1984) and Xing Lu (2004) in respect to Mao's China.
5. It is of interest that *pat'ang* has, since the late 1980s, politicized ideas about *p'ansori* in South Korea, particularly in the writing of the late Paek Taeung (e.g., 1996), moving from *madang* (story, repertoire) to discussions of lineages in which specific singers contributed discrete *pat'ang* (performance features and styles of delivery).
6. Ch'oe and Rim, in *Chosŏn yesul* (1988/9, 62, 1989/11, 41–43).
7. Rendered variously in accounts as “I shall remain single-heartedly loyal,” “My red spirit keeps me strong,” and so on.
8. Hence, it is the first song of 1,000 given in *Yŏnghwa norae 1000 kokchip* (1993).
9. For which, refer to the discussion of Ri Ch'anggu's 1990 text in Chapter 1.
10. Released in Seoul as part of several LP sets, and separately, in 1995, as a six-CD set (Seoul Records SRCD-1293–SRCD-1298).
11. The standard biographies for the singers in her lineage are by Ch'ŏng Noshik (1940).
12. Note that my account is from 2000, long before Kim Jong Il, in death, joined Kim Il Sung in the mausoleum.
13. Discussed by Richard Taylor (1988, 1998, 32–38).
14. For Wigman and Laban, see Manning 1993 and Venters 2016. For the manipulation of spectacles in Germany, see Mosse 1975, and for discussions of Tyrs and the *Sokol* movement see Jandásek 1932 and Nolte 2003, as well as Jahn's own text (Jahn and Eiselen 1816). For Stalinist carnivals, see Sartorti 1990; for the manipulation of mass spectacles by Stalin, see Petrone 2000 and Rolf 2006; for the memories of these, see Paxson 2005; and for their use in Soviet satellite states, see Mosse 1975.
15. After drafting this sentence, I discovered I was not the first to make the connection. As cited by Fischer (2015: 211), Truman (Carrey) asks: “Was nothing real?” And Christof (Ed Harris) replies: “You were real. That's what made you so good to watch.”
16. Burnett (2016, 9–10, 75) notes this term first appeared in an 1827 essay by Eusibius Trahndorff, although the concept of a total work of art had already been proposed by Friedrich Schelling.
17. As in the original title of Groy's *The Total Art of Stalin* (2011): *Gesumtkunstwerk Stalin*.
18. “The Folk might be joint creators in the ideal artistic milieu of the future, but for the present, Wagner as one-man collective will have to do” (Burnett 2016, 102).
19. My comment here is influenced by Andrei Lankov's (2014) discussion of surveillance being part of daily life for the citizens of Pyongyang.
20. As explored by the contributors to Coronil and Skurski 2006.
21. Seen in the Monument to Party Founding (Tangch'ang kŏng'inyŏm tap), built in 1995 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Korean Workers' Party, and sitting on the southern bank of the Taedong River, with a central collar featuring bronze reliefs of the army, peasants, and writers/artists flanked above and below with 216 white

stones. The Party, though, is linked to the then contemporary change in leadership, since the stones symbolize Kim Jong Il, born February (2) 16 (16).

22. Taruskin, with respect to the Soviet Union, writes, "For all its novel bureaucratic vocabulary, socialist realism really meant the institutionalization of petit-bourgeois taste at its most philistine" (1997, 95).

## Chapter 7

1. The shift from Marxism-Leninism to *juche* (and the associated *yuil sasang* single/unitary ideology) was largely complete by the 1970s, so by 2000 the portraits had long outlived their usefulness.
2. For simplicity, I mark geometry here in terms of cardinal points, although in reality the square is set at a slight angle, North-Northwest, South-Southeast, and so on.
3. Schinz and Dege (1990, fig. 14) show the geometric planning before the Monument to Party Founding was built. Philipp Meuser (2012) offers a more recent account.
4. As illustrated in *The Song of Independence, Peace and Friendship* (Pyongyang: Korea Pictorial, 1992), a photo-book of the festival distributed internationally to coincide with Kim's eightieth birthday.
5. Jo's first album as soloist was volume 56 in the long-running *Songs of Korea* series (KM-C-256, 1997), while Jon featured on a number of albums, her seventh being the pop group Pochonbo's 111th release (PEE-C-111, 2000).
6. "I made pizza for Kim Jong-il, Part 2: hot ovens at the seaside," *Asia Times*, August 11, 2001. <http://www.atimes.com/koreas/CH11Dg02.html>. Note that the author is unclear about several details; for "victory," for example, read Kim Il Sung's birthday.
7. VeryMuchSo Productions, directed by Daniel Gordon and produced by Koryo Tours' Nick Bonner.
8. The subject of Kim Jong Il's speech, "On further developing mass gymnastics," given on April 11, 1987 and printed in *Kim Jong Il Selected Works* 9 (1997), 1–19.
9. Featuring in the Polish documentary *Defilada/The Parade* (1989; starting at 33'35").
10. Discussions of "*Arirang*" include those of Suk-Young Kim (2010, 277–92), Chŏng Pyŏnggho (2010), Burnett (2013), Frank (2013), Merkel (2013), Amundsen (2013, 109–84), and Burnett (2016, 385–90). The "*Arirang*" performances in 2015 and 2018 were less elaborate than in earlier years. A comprehensive of mass performance spectacles is given by Han Kyŏngja (2018, 38–39).
11. As with operas, folk songs are used to reflect the lives of people in the past, and contemporary songs for portrayals of socialist life (as confirmed by Pak Tongshik and Kwŏn Yongha 1991).
12. Marsha Haufler (2011) explores the common use of mosaics in North Korean murals; backdrops created by thousands of children are, essentially, upscaled versions of murals.
13. The new instrument is discussed in Chapter 3. According to commentators, Kim Jong Il's birthplace, as mentioned in Chapter 1, was in reality in Vyatskoye, a village in Khabarovsk Krai (district) in Soviet territory.

14. Notwithstanding this, three decades after the state's collapse was widely expected, Eberstadt (2013) makes the point that arguing surveillance sustains the North Korean state is inadequate.
15. Brian Myers argues that events such as "*Arirang*" are not "grim Stalinist exercises in anti-individualism . . . but joyous celebrations of the pure-bloodedness and homogeneity from which the race's superiority derives" (Myers 2010, 83). Myers goes further than I do here.
16. This approach has remained largely in place with the development of animation systems such as the early program LifeForms, developed at Simon Fraser University in Canada and closely related to Benesh, which was, in turn, used by the American dancer Merce Cunningham to develop the 1992 work "Trackers."
17. The dance scholar Judy Van Zile has long used Labanotation to notate traditional Japanese and South Korean dance. Recent years have also seen an increasing use of Labanotation among South Korean dance scholars.
18. The late Chou Chiener helped me locate this information.
19. Kim Ch'aewŏn (2018, 70–72) explores this work.
20. Outlined in the 1984 booklet *New Looks of Chongsan-ri* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publication House). For discussions of how Kim's on-the-spot guidance functioned as part of the Chŏllima movement, see Buzo 1999, 46, 63–64; Armstrong 2014, 47.
21. Discussed, briefly, by Suh Dae Sook (1988, 268, and footnote 24), who refers to a *Kullŏja* article by Chŏn Seborg.
22. In Chapter 1, I introduced lyrics for the song "Embrace of the Motherland" said to have been written by Kim when aged 10, and in Chapter 4 I noted his criticism, when aged 7, of artificial snow in the film "My Hometown." Gabroussenko (2010, 134) relates how the poet Im Hwa came in for criticism when Kim, aged 9, found defeatism and pessimism in his work. But, even more remarkable feats are claimed, most famously, from beyond the cultural world, that in his one and only round of golf he hit 11 holes-in-one and ended 38 under par.
23. This reflects the observation that the vowels and consonants of the Korean alphabet are based on the shape of the mouth and its parts.
24. Hutchinson Guest is particularly remembered for her discussions of Labanotation, on which she published her first account in 1954.
25. Sixty years after Charles Seeger's (1958) landmark article, many still debate the merits of staff notation, although it is generally accepted that using a multitude of systems specific to single music cultures would render communication among musicologists or musicians difficult. Note that in nationalist music circles within South Korea, updated versions of local or regional notations are popular, particularly those based on *chŏngganbo*, a system that once only notated court ritual music.
26. See Chapter 9.
27. See, for example, the tables in Howard 2015a (182, 184, 207, 280, 311, and 340).
28. A VCD of the dance, *Chosŏn minsok muyong: Pongsan t'alch'um* (Pyongyang: Mongnan pideo), was released in 2009.
29. Although now outdated, Hwang Kyŏngsuk 1995 offers a useful overview of these.

30. For an exploration of the criticism, which extended to music, costumes, and practice, see Howard 2012. For explanations and justifications of why this volume used *chamo p'yogibŏp* and Labanotation, see Yi Sukhŭi 2009 and Kim Yŏngsuk 2009.
31. "On the direction which musical creation should take," a talk to creators, October 25, 1968, and "On proper evaluation and treatment of the cultural heritage of our nation with a correct viewpoint and attitude," a talk to propaganda officials, March 4, 1970. There are many similar statements in Kim's *On the Art of Music*, such as: "Music that cannot inspire people with intense ardor is dead music; music that cannot rouse people is valueless. . . . That is why the music of the idle and stultified ruling class of the feudal age cannot advance in our times" (1991, 379). Or: "We must discriminate between progressive, popular elements and outmoded, reactionary elements in the musical heritage of our nation, discard the outmoded and reactionary, and preserve the progressive and popular, while modifying or developing [it]" (1991, 389).
32. Space precludes a full consideration of dance and dancers. Chu Yŏngsŏp (1956, 139) lists dancers who staged performances in Pyongyang between 1945 and 1956, all of whom arguably deserve attention: Chang Ch'uhwa, Chŏn Ŭnsŭng, Chŏng Chisu, Chŏng Tŏkhwŏn, Kim Aesŏng, Kim Kŭmsun, Kim Kwangsu, Ri Hŭijo, Ri Sŏgye, Ri Sun, Ri Talhwa, and Yu Sŏnghŭi. Shin Yŏnghŭi (1996) offers a foundational text about Chŏe Sŭnghŭi's life as a celebrated dancer.
33. A well-known photograph of Chŏe dancing this is in the New York Public Library (reproduced in Van Zile 2001, 192). The vagabond character is akin to a pock-marked Buddhist monk.
34. This becomes clear by comparing Chŏe's 1958 text with recent accounts of folk dances, such as that by Pak Chongsŏng (1991). Again, Chŏe's versions remain as "national folk dances" but are distinguished from local/regional dances of the past in Ri, Yu, and Pak 1991.
35. Van Zile (2001, 282) gives an overview of the many publications and theses on Chŏe through to the late 1990s, and Chapter 8 of her book provides a comprehensive discussion of Chŏe's two-year American stay. Studies on Chŏe published in Seoul since Van Zile's book appeared include those of Yi Aesun (2002), Kim Ch'anjŏng (2003), Chŏng Suung (2004), Han Kyŏngja (2006), Yu Mihŭi (2006) and, looking at her contributions to North Korean dance (rather than her activities when Korea was a Japanese colony), Kim Yuyŏl (2018) and Kim Chiŭn (2018). During the 1950s in Pyongyang, Sŏ Manil serialized her life story in the journal *Chosŏn yesul* (1957/10, 1957/11, 1957/12, 1958/1, 1958/2, 1958/3).
36. A chronological table of Chŏe's known performances and choreography is given by Han Kyŏngja (2008, 238–44).
37. See [http://www.asianinfo.org/asianinfo/korea/perform/modern\\_dances\\_at\\_the\\_time\\_of\\_tra.htm](http://www.asianinfo.org/asianinfo/korea/perform/modern_dances_at_the_time_of_tra.htm). I use the terms "court" and "folk" here in the normative East Asian sense to distinguish the "Great" from the "Little" tradition, although I note Pilzer's comment that this division can force music and dance for the wealthy but positioned outside the court downward into territory occupied by the uneducated masses (2006, 297).

38. Van Zile explores the numerous revivals of “*Chōyongmu*” (2001, 65–109), Jung Rock Seo (2010) details Chinese and Japanese connections, and Hō Yōngil (2012) analyzes its historical documentation.
39. Also known as the Kwangmudae Hyōmnyulsa or the Hūidae, the former being the name of the agency responsible for running it. The theater opened near Seoul’s East Gate in 1902. It closed after two years but reopened in 1908 as the Wōn’gaksa (Cho Yōnggyu 2008, 197; Killick 2010, 31–35).
40. For details of *nongak/p’ungmul* versions, see Howard 1991–1992.
41. Hesselink 2006; Howard 2002, 2015b.
42. Another dancer of modern dance, Cho T’aegwōn (1907–1976), was also closely associated with the colonizers, choreographing, for instance, “*Puyō hoesang*gok/Song of Remembrance for Puyō” (1942) to celebrate the establishment of a Japanese *shintō* shrine on Korean soil. After liberation, although Cho was central in setting up the Korean Dance Art Association (Chosōn muyong yesul hyōphoe), he became a target for nationalists, and left for voluntary exile in the United States in 1956.
43. Gabroussenko hints that Chōe had an affair with Chōng, who she interviewed in exile in Kazakhstan.
44. An account of “Azalea Mountain” was published in *Peking Review* 4 (1974), available at <https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/peking-review/1974/PR1974-04b.htm>, and the Korean-language version was reported in the Yanbian daily newspaper on September 7, 1974.

## Chapter 8

1. Mun Sōngnyōp (2004, 382–84) states that Paek died in 1930, although some southern texts indicate 1950.
2. No scores are known. The pieces are “*Sūnp’yōng manse chigok*/Victorious Reign”; “*Ilmyōng yōmillak*,” based on a fifteenth-century piece that celebrates the creation of the Korean alphabet; and “*P’yōngjo hoesang*,” based on a modal version of a literati suite.
3. The score I have inspected is in the Harvard-Yenching Library. Shin’s name is Romanized “Sin Do Sun.”
4. The citation is reproduced in the journal *Chosōn ūmak* (1961/8, 28).
5. *Hyōnak 4-chungjuwa hyōnak hapchu*. The score I have inspected is held by Yanbian University; I thank Rowan Pease for providing me with a copy.
6. The symphony was written to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the founding of the Korean People’s Army, and its third movement marks the army’s victory at the hill. Chōe is pictured in army uniform in *Chosōn ūmak* (1958/4), where two articles celebrate the symphony.
7. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 5.
8. I elsewhere explore how much the same discussion has taken place among South Korean musicologists (Howard 2006a, xiii, 47–48, 81–82, 100–101).



9. Well-known musicians, such as the conductor Ri Chunmu and the violinist Rim Pyöngsun, thus articulate their biographies around the impact specific songs have had on their appreciation of ideology, and have influenced their musical practice (Ri 2012; Rim 2013).
10. The orchestral version of “Song of Homesickness” is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KoG81ra9HV0>.
11. Other arrangements can be found on the Internet, adjusting the number of melody repeats and the opening and closing sections. See, e.g., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=In8avowVgTQ>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NhlG3WfcHDs>, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PvrX\\_xMi81E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PvrX_xMi81E), and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qPnewNdsewk&t=143s>.
12. As was accepted at the time. The hagiography surrounding Kim Il Sung has long since preached that he defeated the Japanese colonialists.
13. See, e.g., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V8u859TrqNo>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SK-pp9IL0ac>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MRXqBatBgn8>, and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1vctggDYwQ>.
14. The orchestral version is given in *Chosŏn ūmak chŏnjip* 8 (1991, 221–64). Wind orchestra arrangements are at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPXZqsKCpaA> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9u9sMyLnz4>.
15. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cdualYFphG8>, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k995Ky\\_pk5A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k995Ky_pk5A), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XzcWtTmha2I> (as a piano and cello piece), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ByJEKUsr66w> (for *ongnyugŭm* harp zither), and [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cL0x\\_uzMWg&t=183s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cL0x_uzMWg&t=183s).
16. The score in *Chosŏn ūmak chŏnjip* 8 does not give a date, but 1973 is printed in a separate, stand-alone score.
17. Reprinted as *Yun Isang chŏgi kagokchip* (Pyongyang: Yun Isang ūmak yŏnguso, 1991) and as *Chŏgi kagok chip* (Seoul: Ye-eum Foundation, 1994).
18. Beyond Asia, much the same applied to the Persian composer Hormoz Farhat (b. 1930) who, like Maceda, studied at UCLA. For Chou, see Lai 2009, and for Takemitsu, see Burt 2001.
19. Frances Stonor Saunders authored the classic account of how the Cold War impacted avant-garde art, with CIA support, and bolstered by speeches from politicians including Kennedy (1999 and <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/modern-art-was-cia-weapon-1578808.html>). See also Appy 2000.
20. In an interview with Rainer Sachtleben and Wolfgang Winkler, Yun commented that Korean music in the past “had to have titles which were healthy and optimistic, titles which would please the emperor [king]. I composed in this same way until the mid-1970s. I chose titles which had little to do with musical content. The titles were never exact, only symbolic. . . . The titles, if we consider them in any way descriptions of content, are vague indeed” (1987, 292).
21. His political statements are summarized by Jeongmee Kim (1999, 110–12).
22. Today, it is North Korea that is regularly reported to operate schemes involving its workers, under restrictive contracts, in Russia, China, Poland, and the Middle East.



23. The *New York Times* (July 9, 1967) carried a report of his arrest, or rather, the arrest of “members of a large-scale communist espionage network organized by North Korean intelligence officials in East Berlin.” Eventually, as the reality of what had happened became known, the incident caused a diplomatic rift, as detailed in declassified German Ministry of Foreign Affairs papers (Sang Hwang Seong 2005). Seventeen South Koreans in Germany were forcefully taken back to Seoul. Recent considerations of what happened include three chapters by Eun-Joung Lee, Sang-Hwang Seong, and Joanne Miyang Cho, in Cho and Roberts 2018.
24. She subsequently wrote about her experience (Yi Suja 1998, 1, 275).
25. An extensive account is given in the dialogue between Rinser and Yun (See Rinser 2010); Rinser takes her title from the nickname given to Yun by his father, “Wounded Dragon.”
26. Walter-Wolfgang Sparrer was also present, and this comment reflects an e-mail exchange I had with him in September 2017.
27. Scripts are printed in yearbooks of film, the *Chosŏn yŏnghwa ryŏngam*, and in separate volumes. Two volumes about the series, essentially offering positive criticism, are by Ryu, Ōm, and Cho (2002). Parts 1–4 explore the anti-Communist Chŏe Hyŏndŏk; Parts 6–8 discuss Ri Chŏngmo, who was imprisoned in South Korea after the Korean War, Parts 9–13 address the South Korean patriot Ch’a Honggi; Parts 17–19 look at the female revolutionary Hŏ Chŏngsun; Parts 20–25 discuss Japanese women who “chose” to live in North Korea; Parts 26–36 examine workers; and so on, until Parts 61–62, which fictionalize the lives of peasant workers.
28. Schönherr (2012, 115), citing the photo-journal *Democratic People’s Republic of Korea* (2001/9). Schönherr reports that Kim was well aware of Yamada’s work, and that Yamada was a guest of honor at the Pyongyang Film Festival in 2000 (207).
29. *Gastarbeiter*. The formal program ran from the 1950s, to counter severe labor shortages after World War II. Most South Korean men worked as miners and women as nurses—records document 8,000 miners and 10,000 nurses who were employed in Germany through to 1977. See <https://www.domid.org/en/news/이주-50-years-korean-migration-germany>.
30. A reminder: North Korea has officially abandoned such superstitious beliefs and practices.
31. Written between 1965 and 1968, “Träume” consists of “Der Traum des Liu-Tung” (premiered in 1965) and “Die Witwe des Schmetterlings” (premiered in 1969).
32. Accounts of the Kwangju uprising and its bloody suppression include those by Clark (1988), Lewis (2002), and Gi-Wook Shin and Kyung Moon Hwang (2003).
33. Although joint statements by North and South Korea on reunification were issued in July 1972 and June 2000, the policies of the two states differ. Briefly stated, it is not the case that successive southern governments have opposed reunification, but they have rejected the northern proposal to establish a federation that would maintain the two political systems until elections bring unification, preferring an economic solution that will gradually bring the two closer.
34. Throughout the films, Seoul is portrayed as if in the 1950s, little different from the days of Japanese colonialism, with jeeps and American-style Japanese cars, seedy

- strip joints, and dirty streets full of thugs sporting dark shades. By 1992, however, modernity had transformed Seoul beyond recognition. One reason for the depiction is mundane: the Pyongyang Film Studios, where the films were made, only had a single outdoor set for Seoul, and this had to be used regardless of the story.
35. The celebrated composer Kim Wŏngyun reflected on what he considered the successful concerts in an article published in *Chosŏn yesul* (1990/12). Yu Youngmin, a South Korean researcher working in Los Angeles, in her PhD dissertation, also spins the concerts in a positive light, translating one statement by Kim: “We confirmed . . . that all [southern] musicians have maintained the beautiful sound of traditional national music and have the intention to develop [it] in a united way” (2007, 147). Yun led the northern contingent of artists, and the composer and *kayagŭm* zither player Byungki Hwang (1936–2018) led southern artists. Yun and Hwang had first met in Amsterdam in 1974, at the European premiere of Hwang’s “*Ch’imhyangmu*/Dance in the Perfume of Aloes” (1973). In 1990 both signed a flag depicting the peninsula, which was kept at Yun’s institute in Pyongyang when I visited in 2000. A score of “My Land, My People” (with the title only rendered in Korean) was published in Pyongyang in 1989.
  36. Established in 1961 as the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (Chungang chŏngbobu) and renamed in 1981 as the Agency for National Security Planning (Kukka anjŏn’gi hoebu, from which the acronym comes), the An’gibu in 1999 assumed its current name, the National Intelligence Service (Kukka chŏngbowŏn).
  37. The same applies to, say, the impact of Laibach’s 2016 concert in Pyongyang or the tightly controlled annual Pyongyang International Film Festival: an invited audience at one or a small number of events does not indicate that people at large are allowed access.
  38. The German title of “My Land” is given on the CD, in capitals: “MEIN LAND, MEIN VOLK.”
  39. Recorded, with the two parts split between Münchner and Bayerischer Rundfunk orchestras, on a Yun Foundation disc (Internationalen Isang Yun Gesellschaft e.V. CD IYG 011, 2016).
  40. For an analysis of which, see Howard and Spangenberg 2003.

## Chapter 9

1. One result of this in North Korea is that romantic love is largely absent from song lyrics. Instead, where physical attraction is indicated, it is associated with ideology and with loyalty to the leadership or the party (Myers 2010, 86; Tudor and Pearson 2015, 70; Zeglen 2017, 143).
2. Cited in <http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1961-2/khrushchev-on-the-arts/khrushchev-on-the-arts-texts/khrushchev-on-music-in-soviet-society/>, which in turn cites Slominsky 1971, 1377–78. It is not only totalitarian states that seek to censor and control popular culture: consider how the American Parents Music Resource Center succeeding in 1985 in mandating labels on LP and CD recordings that carried the warning, “Parental Advisory: Explicit Lyrics.” Policing popular music has been

- explored in, among other texts, *Index on Censorship* 6 (1998), Cloonan and Garofalo 2003, and Korpe 2004.
3. North Korean propaganda continued to take its lead from the Soviet Union and its eastern European satellites into the 1980s, as Nicholas Bonner (2017, 11) confirms in respect to print media and art.
  4. As Kershaw (2000) points out.
  5. A number of video documentaries of the 1992 and later tours, originally made for broadcast, have been released.
  6. Discussing incomes in North Korea is not a reliable indicator of wealth, since in 1992 (and up to that time) wages did not need to cover all living expenses, because the public distribution system still functioned. However, in this case, 10 percent of *disposable* income still represents a significant investment.
  7. From 1985 until 1993, separate music yearbooks, *Chosŏn ūmak ryŏn'gam*, were published. In 1994, music was amalgamated with other arts in a short-lived *Chosŏn yesul ryŏn'gam*, which was soon combined with literature as the *Chosŏn munhak yesul ryŏn'gam* yearbook.
  8. For a recent recycled version of these images, see <http://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/north-korea-hermit-country-space-photos/>.
  9. Library of Congress figures give –3.7 percent for 1990 and –5.2 percent in 1991, while CIA figures report a –3 percent rate for 1999. There are many discussions of how and why the economy declined; see, for example, Cornell 2002, 183–85; Becker 2005, 101–23; Smith 2005; Cha 2012, 110–61; Lankov 2015, 259–83. A nuanced discussion of the famine, told through interviews with survivors, is provided by Fahy (2015).
  10. After Kim Jong Il had been promoted as his father's successor, rumors of unease still regularly surfaced, and he allegedly survived several assassination attempts. His adopted name, "Jong Il," may have been chosen to claim the succession, with characters for "righteousness" and "first" (Hassig and Oh 2015, 21); others, though, point to the same syllables in his parents' names. Kim Il Sung's younger brother, Kim Yŏngju (b. 1920), who conducted secret talks with the United States in the 1970s but then fell out of favor, was one rival, while a second was one of four children from Kim Il Sung's second marriage to Kim Sŏngae, Kim P'yŏngil (b. 1954), an influential diplomat serving in Europe at the time of his father's death.
  11. For which, see, for example, Tak, Kim, and Pak 1985, 9. As noted earlier, most foreign commentators report that Kim Jong Il was actually born in the Soviet Far East (see, e.g., Clippinger 1981; Buzo 1999).
  12. Quoted to me, in English, by Pak Songok, Secretary General of the Korean Committee for Friendship with the British People, London, September 2002.
  13. The common version of "*Arirang*," known throughout the peninsula, tells of migrant workers in the late nineteenth century reconstructing the royal palace in Hanyang (today's Seoul) as they looked to their hometowns over Arirang Hill (near today's Tonamdong in northeastern Seoul). Although "*Arirang*" is named in a 1756 manuscript, the current version developed in the early twentieth century in Seoul, based on an earlier song from Chŏngsŏn to the east (Kim Yŏngap 1986; Yi Pohyŏng 1997). Its popularity increased rapidly, so much so that many regional versions were created.

The song is often considered to have taken on its nationalist tint after it was sung at the screening of a silent film produced in 1926; as a monologue with song, this was recorded by Kang Sögyön around 1930 (track 6 on the CD to Howard 2006b). Notwithstanding this, “*Arirang*” was widely recorded and distributed in Japan during the 1930s (Atkins 2007), and it has served as the anthem when North and South Korean teams have come together in sporting events, such as at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games and the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics.

14. The lodestar, given human form as Kim Il Sung.
15. Kim was beset by illness: epilepsy, diabetes, and diseases relating to heavy drinking and smoking were all routinely mentioned by observers, although since state media showed him only in still photographs, determining much about his health was never easy. Although he disappeared from view in August, it was only a month later, when he failed to attend a military parade to mark 60 years of the state’s existence, that rumors multiplied.
16. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/7930775.stm>.
17. [http://web.archive.org/web/20160304074646/http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/06/01/kim-jongun-north-koreas-k\\_n\\_210065.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20160304074646/http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/06/01/kim-jongun-north-koreas-k_n_210065.html).
18. [http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2009/06/19/2009061900402.html](http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2009/06/19/2009061900402.html).
19. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-11417016>.
20. “Ünhasu” also signifies the Milky Way.
21. Conducted by the South Korean Myung-whun Chung (b. 1953), former music director of the Paris Opera and, since 2005, principal conductor of the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra. The Paris performance was planned to coincide with Kim Jong Il’s seventieth birthday in February, although, following Kim’s death, it was postponed until March.
22. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-north-tapshoes-idUSTRE7504F520110601>.
23. *Changgun* marks the commander-in-chief, hence the highest general; *taejang* is a run-of-the-mill general. While *changgun* initially referred to Kim Il Sung as the “Great General,” when he became leader (as *suryöng*), Kim Jong Il became *changgun*.
24. Cathcart usefully explores how Kim Jong Un images his grandfather, and the syndrome this entails (2017, 6–13).
25. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qy\\_zG8U4E3Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qy_zG8U4E3Y).
26. The group, performing “*Öüñgüm pyöngchàng*,” featured in two KCNA reports, on February 13 and March 3, 2012. See, also, [http://www.buzzfeed.com/whitneyjefferson/north-korea-celebrates-the-life-of-kim-jong-il-wit?utm\\_term=.dnJjKn9bWx#.ewm5avoD9r](http://www.buzzfeed.com/whitneyjefferson/north-korea-celebrates-the-life-of-kim-jong-il-wit?utm_term=.dnJjKn9bWx#.ewm5avoD9r), and <http://www.digitaljournal.com/article/319839>.
27. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bx9ZM1Xf98o>.
28. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-spOplalKI>.
29. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPPoD4eVrIM>.
30. The escalating “vile and violent blood-lust” rhetoric of the time has been discussed by Foster-Carter (2012).
31. The outline of the Korean peninsula is today routinely imagined as a tiger. Until the 1980s, it tended to be regarded as outlining a rabbit but, given the tiger economy of

- South Korea and the weaponry of North Korea, this is no longer considered appropriate on either side of the DMZ.
32. kcna.co.jp, April 26, 2012, cited at <http://www.northkoreatech.org/2012/04/25/more-anti-lee-vitriol-and-a-song> (now deleted).
  33. *Kukka* does come once, but *taeguk* appears in the first stanza. The commentator Shuan Sim seems to have first suggested the downgrade; see <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/07/kim-jong-uns-official-new-theme-song-translated/259475/>.
  34. *Chŏnman*, used to signify the total population.
  35. The 1985 yearbook reports on the activities of state *yesuldan* in each province and in the cities of P'yŏngyang, Namp'o, Kaesŏng, and Chŏngjin; the Kaesŏng *yesuldan*, to cite one, gave one performance every second month.
  36. See Stephen Haggard and Marcus Noland, "The winter of their discontent: Pyongyang attacks the market," *Peterson Institute for International Economics: Policy Brief*, January 10, 2010, <http://www.iie.com/publications/pb/pb10-01.pdf>. Also, Audrey Abrahamian, Geoffrey K. See, and Wang Xingyu, "The ABCs of North Korea's SEZs," US-Korea Institute at SAIS, 2014, <http://www.uskoreainstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/Abrahamian-SEZs-14-1118-HQ-Print.pdf>.
  37. At <http://freemuse.org/freemuseArchives/freerip/freemuse.org/sw18963.html>. See also "Guitar diplomacy," in *Songlines* 46 (September/October 2007), 17.
  38. See also "Kŭmsŏnghagwŏn ŭi tokch'ang kasu, pungnyŏk ŭi pŏsŭt'ŭreida twoeda," *Minjog21*, at <http://www.minjog21.com/news/articlePrint.html?idyno=5370>, and Pekka Korhonen's discography of Ŭnhasu, at <http://unhasu.wordpress.com>.
  39. Violinist Chŏng Sŏnyŏng, bass Kim Kyŏngho, and concert master Mun Kyŏngjin. To date, the most comprehensive discussion is by Korhonen and Koidl (2018).
  40. <http://www.allkpop.com/article/2011/11/north-korean-celebrities-are-struggling-because-of-the-hallyu-wave>, citing a report from Radio Free Asia.
  41. See, for example, Hassig and Oh (2015, 111–15), and Robert Boynton's report in *The Atlantic*, "North Korea's digital underground" (2011), <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/04/north-koreas-digital-underground/308414/>, and [http://www.vice.com/en\\_us/article/7x9x8d/north-koreas-secret-weapon-is-terrible-synth-pop](http://www.vice.com/en_us/article/7x9x8d/north-koreas-secret-weapon-is-terrible-synth-pop).
  42. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Eq2g-be9mc>.
  43. See, for example, the memoirs of the director-and-actress couple Shin and Chŏe (Shin 1988; Shin and Chŏe 1994).
  44. In addition to printing photographs of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il at events, *Chosŏn ŭmak ryŏn'gam*, music yearbooks in the 1980s and 1990s, detail events attended by the leaders during the preceding year before discussing anything else.
  45. I have not included a photograph of Moranbong here; at the time of writing, their video clips are readily available online.
  46. This term was regularly used for late 1990s South Korean pop bands such as FinK.L, and usefully allows "cute" to be distinguished from "sexy" in a way that does not disturb North Korea's social conservatism.

47. Moranbong has to date been explored mostly by journalists and in online articles. See Chŏn Hyŏnshik 2015, 594–614, for a comprehensive list of Korean articles and Lim 2017, 609–12, for English-language sources.
48. The same applies to Ŭnhasu and Samjiyŏn and, indeed, music students sent abroad predominantly train in the Western art music tradition.
49. Their take on “El Condor Pasa,” readily available online, offers a good comparison: white dresses, foregrounded soloists, and a curtain hiding drums, guitars, and other accompanists.
50. At <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdf00H7AuP4>. Note that although the French title is given, the Korean surtitle is “*Na ŭi kil*” (“My Way”).
51. Ana María Ochoa Gautier (2014, 2015) has noted that sound, or the enforced absence of sound (that is, silence) can contribute to violence. Equally, then, the public soundscape of Pyongyang, with the ever-present broadcasts of songs, can be considered as violence.
52. Vinalon is a synthetic material invented in North Korea and associated with Kim Jong Il, because he frequently wore jackets made from it. It is an everyday fabric, marking industrialism as socialist everyday life, as the title to Chapter 6 in *Heroes and Toilers* (Kim Cheehyung 2018) has it. One song associated with the Ŭnhasu orchestra was “*Pinallon samchŏlli/3000 Li of Vinalon*,” written in 2010 by An Chŏnggho to lyrics by Yun Tugŭn.
53. For example, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/south-korea-went-gaga-over-a-north-korean-singer-just-wait-until-the-rest-arrive/2018/01/22/ecf39004-ff7e-11e7-93f5-53a3a47824e8\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.48b78c23b2ca](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/south-korea-went-gaga-over-a-north-korean-singer-just-wait-until-the-rest-arrive/2018/01/22/ecf39004-ff7e-11e7-93f5-53a3a47824e8_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.48b78c23b2ca), and <http://www.newsweek.com/north-korea-sent-ex-pop-star-south-distraction-strategy-report-794803>.
54. Jane Chung, “North Korean orchestra serenades South Koreans amid protest,” *Reuters*, February 8, 2018, at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-olympics-2018-northkorea-orchestra/north-korean-orchestra-serenades-south-koreans-amid-protest-idUSKBN1FS1Z6>. See also Amy Qin, “North Korean orchestra gives an emotional concert in the South,” *New York Times*, February 8, 2018, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/08/world/asia/north-korea-orchestra-olympics.html>, and Vincent van Gogh, “K-pop star performs with North Korean Samjiyon Orchestra,” *Korea Times*, February 11, 2018, at [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/art/2018/02/690\\_244030.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/art/2018/02/690_244030.html).
55. Originally created by the Irish-Norwegian duo Secret Garden, Josh Groban’s 2003 recording is perhaps the most popular version in much of the world, although Westlife’s 2005 version is better known in Britain.
56. For an (earlier) English-language account of Girls’ Generation, see Epstein 2015.
57. Videos are at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3fbnmTi9aKw> and [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G\\_cxrcB7lr4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_cxrcB7lr4).
58. One visitor to Pyongyang that spring, however, tells me Red Velvet’s songs were circulating there, and South Korean television did broadcast their performances in Pyongyang. See [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzbDd\\_MFa6k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzbDd_MFa6k), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-g\\_bAsndgE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-g_bAsndgE), and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XojMcePZKDI>.

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